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About this issue's cover



On 12 February 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia, thousands served notice that not everyone was happy with the Winter Olympics, which were kicking off that day at a gala ceremony attended by dignitaries from around the world. The protests marked the culmination of a cross-Canada campaign that began in 2006, when construction of Olympics facilities got underway. Protesters

blockaded roads; sabotaged construction equipment; vandalized corporate sponsors; staged evictions; disrupted media events; and, in one brazen move, stole an over-sized Olympic flag that hung outside Vancouver's City Hall. 'No Olympics on Stolen Native Land' was the slogan coined by Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw Nation), an activist with deep roots in Vancouver's anarchist community, to spearhead these actions. The slogan called attention to the fact that the Winter Olympics were to take place on lands that have never been ceded by Indigenous peoples to any colonizing government, including Canada. The cover photo includes, on the left, a banner with Hill's image of a striking eagle against a blazing sun. The eagle is an Indigenous symbol of power while Hill's sun imagery is taken from the flag of the Mohawk Warrior Society, the organization which defended Indigenous lands during an armed standoff with the Canadian military outside Montreal, Quebec, in 1990. On the right is a massive \$150,000 dollar flag wrapped around a twelve-storey building to promote Canadian jingoism. This flag was vandalized a few days later when a slogan was carved into it – 'F U 2010' – in letters so huge they could be seen from blocks away. The centrepiece is a thirty-foot Salmon puppet created by Victoria anarchists Kim Crowell and Nancy Powell. Indigenous peoples have honoured the salmon as a source of life from time immemorial. However over the last decade stocks have plummeted dramatically due to commercial over-fishing, pollution from fish farms, the destruction of spawning grounds through logging, and hydroelectric dam projects. While the governments of British Columbia and Canada were blowing six billion dollars on a two-week sports celebration enshrining the institution of the State, a species that sustained the coastal region's Indigenous peoples for millennia has been dying, and with it, an entire eco-system.

Allan Antliff

Editorial

Ruth Kinna

A recent post on the anarchist academics list asked users to suggest five books that every anarchist 'should read'. Respondents could include fiction and non-fiction. The request, one of the first respondents noted, promised not just an exchange of ideas about what might be regarded as 'key' or 'good' in an 'anarchist canon', but a more profound interaction about reading. This implied a degree of trust (that choices won't be ridiculed) - and above all confidence - that choices accurately capture deeply-held beliefs or self-understandings (and/or that the reasons for inclusion will be clear). At first, not many users replied. Earlier suggestions to set up a virtual book club have been met by a similar lack of public response. Is the problem indecision or lack of trust and confidence? How many users, I wonder, can name their top five without hesitation? I suspect more than are prepared to say. Even if the choices are changed as soon as they're listed, it's not difficult to draw up a mental list of five books. It's much more troubling telling others what your choices are: Is volume 5 of Reclus's *Universal Geography* too nerdy? Might *Infantile Leftism* be confusing?

At the risk of work avoidance, I suspended my own doubts about cheap TV ranking programmes and thought for a bit about what I'd choose. I soon found that I couldn't stop myself from looking along at the bookshelves behind me. The desire to check the mental list against the wider possible selection was an error because it injected a fatal moment of doubt: spontaneity gave way to a concern with justification, what was appropriate and, finally, to a worry about what might be read into any selection I might make. I checked the email again: no one else had written in. Clearly, I wasn't alone. And if the slow but steady flood of top-fives suggested that the problem was just mine, the extended debate about some inclusions bolstered my initial suspicions, though I greatly enjoyed looking at what others were willing to share.

To business: this issue has no particular theme, and the essays are as rich in their diversity as they are in their analyses. Guido Preparata's essay, which examines the thought of Silvio Gesell and Rudolf Steiner, is a companion piece to his article 'Of money, heresy, and surrender: The ways of our system - an outline, from Bretton Woods to the financial slump of 2008' which appeared in issue 17.1. Francis Dupuis-Déri examines affinity groups and shows how and why they are suited to anarchist actions. Laurence Davis considers the dichotomy of lifestyle and social anarchism in a critical review of Bookchin's work. Last, not least, Roger Farr discusses the anarchism of the Dada poet, Hugo Ball.

Looking forward, in the next issue of *Anarchist Studies* we will mark the centenary of Tolstoy's death with an editorial by Alex Christoyannopoulos and Terry Hopton and a short reflection on *What is Art?* by Allan Antliff.

To return to my list, I confess that Tolstoy did not appear in my first cut. There instead was: Kropotkin, *Appeal to the Young*, Isabel Meredith, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, Goodman and Goodman, *Communitas* ... and then I was stuck: *The Alexander Berkman Reader: Life of an Anarchist* (ed. Fellner) or Paul Auster *Leviathan*?

Of Money, Heresy, and Surrender, Part II:

A Plea for a Regional and Perishable Currency

Guido Giacomo Preparata

ABSTRACT

A fundamental but neglected truth about the nature of money resides in its *imperishable* character. The advertence to this peculiar physical property of the money metals, which have traditionally been employed as the chief means of payment before being transmuted into the virtual form of contemporary bank money, has seldom been made in the vast literature dealing with the subject. It stands as one of the great merits of the German anarchist current of thought of the early twentieth century (Silvio Gesell and Rudolf Steiner in particular) to have acknowledged the extraordinarily unfair advantage wielded by ‘money’ vis-à-vis the rest of the economy, and sought thereby to remedy this distortion via the introduction of a time-sensitive money certificate. This article explores the institutional and theoretical issues that have led to this innovation, and concludes with a brief survey of the record achieved thus far by the late attempts of introducing in several parts of the world regional currencies in substitution of proprietary bank money – i.e., money as we know it.

Keywords *monetary reform, Gesell, Steiner, negative interest rate*

INTRODUCTION

Sagredo: And can we think of a greater inanity than that which treasures things such as gems, silver, and gold, and vilifies, on the other hand, dirt and the earth? [...] I believe that those extravagantly bent on extolling imperishability, inalter-

ability and the like are prompted to utter these things by the anxious wish to live long and by the terror of death. They forget to reckon that if men were immortal, it wouldn't be their lot to come into this world.

Galileo, *Dialogo sopra ai massimi due sistemi*

A necessary condition, though possibly not a sufficient one, for the improvement of collective life is that the money of the world communities ought, like the goods and performances it is assigned to mirror, have an expiration date. In other words, *money must die*. The economic root of all social and economic evil does not so much reside in Man's avid obsessions, but rather in the transformation of the means of payment – a mere intangible sign – into a tradable good, which is managed by an establishment of private owners – the oligopolistic banking cartel – within the virtual boundaries of a *proprietary network*. The wills and appetites of the network's custodians perforce direct, shape and inform the activities of the world at large, for every economic endeavour begins with the issuance of *money*. The first distortion wrought upon money was thus to have assimilated it to a commodity; a commodity – gold above all – *which possesses the formidable, and perfectly un-economic property of never perishing*.

Proponents of a dying currency were granted a nook of the social forum during the 1920s in Germany. Silvio Gesell (1862-1930) – an ex-businessman of dental tools catapulted by anarchist demand to the post of Finance Minister in a five-day Soviet experiment in Munich (1919) – and Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) – the Austrian mystic who did not leave a single stone of the physical and praeternatural realms unturned, are the two isolated prophets of perishable money. They roused some passion in their time, but after the fire of the Depression and its bellicose resolution (WWII), their reflections on the nature of money were shoved from the discursive periphery to the warehouse of irrelevance.

These last years, however, it appears that movements advocating regional currencies and groups of committed dissidents seeking to bring decisions where they belong – in the community's fold – are astir: at the grassroots, perishable money has been rediscovered; more and more individuals are striving to bypass the oligarchic network, by establishing alternative grids of economic exchange. Within such weaves of relations, a periodical charge imposed on money balances – i.e., *the imposition of a negative rate of interest* – would act as the natural stimulant to circu-

lation and trade, as well as the most conspicuous impediment to pecuniary hoarding, which is the curse of economic life.

This essay is divided into three sections. The first 'Of Money' introduces the money question initially by relating the life and exploits of the economic doyen of German anarchism, Silvio Gesell. Gesell's crucial, yet still poorly known, reformist endeavour, is complemented – in the second section 'Heresy' – by the fascinating intuitions of Rudolf Steiner, who reached conclusions virtually identical to those of Gesell. There follows a review of the several alternative systems of exchange based on and inspired by this anarchistic tradition of regional self-help, which has been recently launched (for the most part in Germany) to overcome economic hardships and/or to stimulate communal entrepreneurship. The third and concluding section 'And surrender' addresses the state of public knowledge in monetary matters by focusing on the tangle of official 'theories' and opinions that presently account for the utter confusion reigning over this subject. Indeed, it will be seen that the most critical aspects of contemporary monetary policy bear a tight and intriguing connection to the very theoretical subtleties developed by the anarchist tradition three generations ago.

OF MONEY

The case of Silvio Gesell is somewhat extraordinary. In his youth, he had been one of those adventurous merchants that Germany produced in profusion during the illusory and heady days of the Wilhelmine belle époque. He had made good money selling German tools in Argentina, and eventually retired to Switzerland in 1900 to enjoy the fruits of his commercial labours as a gentleman-farmer. In his retreat, he found time to elaborate particular ideas for economic reform that had been taking shape in his mind over the course of his commercial experience. Indeed, he had learned economics the hard way; he had seen in function the engine of business enterprise from the inside. Doubtless, he reasoned, the capitalist machine ... *worked*. No less doubtful, however, was the fact that such a machine, humanly speaking, 'worked' exploitatively, and that it periodically sputtered into malfunction, before collapsing altogether with cyclical punctuality, inflicting all manner of pain across the social spectrum. Gesell claimed that he knew with precision which aspect of the engine's design was flawed and ultimately responsible for all such economic anguish. And it had to do almost exclusively with the very

special institutional arrangement of our *monetary* apparatus. Injustice, in other words, was for Gesell rooted first and foremost in the institution of money itself, rather than, say, in the common practices and contractual laws ruling labour dynamics (wage bargaining, union-action etc.). Indeed, from Gesell's perspective, the problematics of labour, unemployment and depression are to be construed as important social *consequences* of the primary institutional error upon which our traditional monetary system has been edified.

Gesell shunned from the outset the eventuality (or expediency) of hitching his urge for radical reform to the political locomotive of Marxist socialism. When it came to monetary matters, Marxism, in fact, was no less conservative and authoritarian than its Liberal counterpart – the advocates of both camps saw things exactly alike: money *is* gold and vice versa, and it is ultimately to be entrusted to the offices of a central bank.¹ To Gesell, Marx and his followers were missing the point entirely. Gesell aspired to a *practical*,² non-Statalist technical correction of the system's monetary engineering, one whose implementation would have gradually effected the transition to a form of communitarian socialism resting upon free, private initiative – in brief, the classic anarchistic economic ideal-type.

Once retired, Gesell committed his ideas to paper; they circulated in the form of numerous pamphlets, which he initially sent to academics, politicians and professionals, without, at first, eliciting any kind of response. A systematic and organised expression of his intuitions eventually appeared in book format in 1916 under the title *Die Natürliche Wirtschaftsordnung* (The Natural Economic Order, NEO hereafter). Revised in 1919, the new edition of the NEO became the platform of Gesellian economics, his masterpiece and definitive formulation of the monetary question.³ Unbeknownst to many anarchists, sadly, this is one of anarchism's sacred texts.⁴

By the end of the Great War, however, Gesell had managed to attract a following – one sufficiently diffuse and feisty to find itself in an extraordinary position of leadership during the season of the German Soviets (the *Räte-Regierungen*, November 1918-June 1919).⁵ In the course of what came to be called the 'Conciliar movement' – a semi-spontaneous, communitarian uprising that burgeoned in hundreds of German cities and boroughs in the aftermath of defeat, and of the temporary power vacuum in Berlin – panels of improvised legislators, drawn from an array of artists, military men and professionals, seized

the communal helm all over Germany. Munich, in particular, experienced three soviets: 1) an initial constituency headed by the Socialists gave way to 2) an administration of playwrights and free-wheeling anarchists (from April 8 to April 13, 1919), who were ousted in turn by 3) Communist militias. Commandos of White guards led by war veterans, themselves directed by the newly reconstituted authority in the German capital, would drown all experiments in blood in the spring of 1919. It was on these ashes that Weimar was shakily erected.

During Munich's second soviet, Gesell was sworn in as Finance Minister by his friend, the Culture Minister and anarchist luminary, Gustav Landauer. It took Gesell and his associates no time to produce what they saw as the grail of economic prosperity: a chest bulging with reams of quaint certificates, each bearing on its back a quainter grid – a square-pattern, made of tiny little boxes upon which one was to affix periodically a purple stamp. Thus '*taxed*', Gesell reasoned, money 1) would reflect the depreciation to which all staples are subjected; 2) it would not be hoarded; and 3) it would steer the path of economic expansion onto a plane denoted by the absence of inflation, crises and usury. This would be revolution.

Could such a simple scheme truly do all this? And if so, why, and how? In those Bavarian days, this most ambitious project never saw the light of day; before the strange bills could be put into circulation, Communist posses loyal to Berlin's Marxist directorate drove out the anarchist soviet. Gesell died in 1930, his spirit hallowed ever since by an anarchist minority. In the following two years, two experiments inspired by his example were attempted, with success, in Austria and Bavaria, as we shall relate below. They were eventually truncated by the years of rearmament (1935-39). Thereafter, the West came to witness (1939-45), Bretton Woods (1944-71), Stagflation (1974-78), Neoliberalism (1979-1987), and finally the New Economy (1990-present). Interestingly, it is during this last period that Gesellian schemes have been revived: from small beginnings – mostly in Germany – to develop a little life of their own, once more, perhaps as harbingers and symptoms of profound crisis, like their antecedents in the 1930s.

So what was the theory behind Gesell's funny paper? What was the intuition, and the deeper meaning of such an artifice as Gesellian '*stamp scrip*' for the economy as whole?

GESELL'S THEORY OF INTEREST

Gesell set the stage for his proposal by calling the reader's attention to a fundamental mismatch. On one side of the economic playing field, he argued, there is conventional merchandise (goods of all sorts, from lettuce to bricks), on the other, there is money – *gold*, to be precise. The basic intuition is the following: merchandise cannot afford to wait – for it goes bad – but gold can, for it is *imperishable*. Stated differently, there exists a fundamental imbalance on the plane of exchange between two qualitatively different kinds of *commodities*: namely, between regular staples and gold, which – and this is the crucial insight – has been mistakenly enshrined as the conventional means of payment from time immemorial. Why this has been so is known: the more the communities of men have been disjointed by war, intrigue, suspicion and cultural difference, the more they have tended to rely on a (gold-) monetary standard that 1) would be accepted by each self-guarded economic bloc in times of trading truce, and 2) would 'congeal' wealth, as it were (the conventional misnomer for this notion is 'savings') in the structure of a noble metal's imperishable substance. In other words, when trust breaks down and conflict looms, one goes a-burying gold in the backyard – a cheque-book, or a mere claim, offers no tangible, fall-back 'security'.

Yet, in principle, we know it: in its purest and most fluid guise, money is a token, a *symbolic* expression – a notion devoid of physical substance. Presently the problem is that, even though gold has disappeared from the public's view, we trade and transact in the world market with a means of payment that we look upon as if it were still endowed with the physical property of noble metals. And the power of banking rests precisely on the crystallization of such misperception.

Therefore, an embarrassment ensues: the producer, who is *demanding money* from the banking system for his business, *has to yield*, or else his goods will rot. *And it is in this imbalance*, Gesell argued, *that the seeds of usury lie*: i.e., not in the tension between capitalist – and wage-earner, but in that between producer and banker – the charging of *interest*. Interest, Gesell tells us, never is the legitimate recompense of thrift, or a natural price that is due to some nondescript 'saver', as maintained by the scholars of the Liberal school. In truth, what any saver ultimately possesses is a batch of goods that await consumption in a warehouse – the money corresponding to these goods is a collection of mere tokens that are supposed to facilitate the transfer of the goods from their owner to entrepreneurs

that will actually ‘build’ something *durable* with them. This is what we denote as *investment*. Investment, Gesell insisted, is nothing but deferred consumption of longer-lived commodities. We shall return to this in the following section.

Interest, however, is something altogether different: it is a *fee*, a tribute which the producer pays to the banker in order to achieve a twofold objective: 1) to obtain for his business *imperishable* cash, which was issued as the banker’s paper-money against a hoard of gold, and 2) to gain access to a ramified proprietary (banking) grid, along which computer-money travels nowadays, enabling thereby swift, efficient payment across the world.

How money is injected into circulation, we all know: banks *mortgage* future earnings and possessions (a person’s, a firm’s, etc.), and upon such collateral they issue a *loan*, the repayment of which is at the heart of every single macroeconomic chronicle of our history. So, in the beginning there is gold. Gold engenders interest as well as a payments network. Interest is exacted from loans, by means of which money reaches the population. The elementary difficulty arising out of this basic arrangement is that, *in the aggregate*, the population, by definition, can never repay the loan plus the interest. So the original loans need to be continually re-scheduled, at the cost of snowballing interest dues, to keep the economy in motion.

Theoretically, we now have an *anchor* in the system: what Gesell calls *Urzins* (basic interest). This is the fundamental variable – the initial condition – upon whose dynamics the performance of the economy will hinge. In brief, Gesell’s Theory of Interest simply holds that businesses are initially charged basic interest – a somewhat invariable usurious hard core, which is imposed irrespective of any other surrounding economic conditions. Thereafter, businesses will distribute, arrange and/or curtail output in view of generating sales that will cover interest (i.e., overhead) plus whatever entrepreneurial profit they may squeeze out of the market. Thus, what we call the ‘rate of return’ or the ‘interest upon capital’ of a business is at all times dictated and driven by the money rates set by the banking sector: intuitively, if central banks decide for whatever reason to raise their rate, and consequently commercial banks react by increasing the prime rate, businesses struggle accordingly to match the higher price of money by attempting to garner higher profits. Such pecuniary dearth will perforce hurt the weaker segments of the economy, which will immediately begin to shed jobs.

Gesell treated *Urzins* as some sort of exogenous variable. He averred that this

hard core of usury (that is, interest, shorn of insurance premiums and adjustments for inflation) has oscillated in the last two millennia around an average of 4-5%. The artistry of banking consists precisely in setting the tone for a scale of interest rates in conjunction with the economy's overall rate of profitability and the reflux of taxation. In other terms, central bankers must guess a narrow range of values for their rate of interest (the tribute imposed for the privileged access to the network), such that businesses would not be burdened by these banking charges to the point that they will have to cease operations, and such that the citizens' wages would be capable of affording familial sustenance as well as the undisturbed remittance of interest by way of 1) taxation (to honour the public debt), and 2) private transfers to credit card companies (i.e., private debt). Metaphorically speaking, (central) banking is not unlike the subtle practice of bleeding the body without sucking it dry.

The bloodletting (deprivation of leisure, recreation, and pursuit of the arts and sciences) thus foisted on the working many is also a more or less unintentional debilitation of their faculties: it is no wonder, as Thorstein Veblen – another magisterial, yet unheeded voice of anarchism – clearly understood, that conservatism is exhibited in a high degree amongst the labouring classes.⁶

Thus 'interest' yielded by (conventional) imperishable money is the origin, the initial spark, of a *generalized rent-creating* process: as the banker controls the supply of money (gold is the scarce commodity *par excellence*) and, for its usage, demands a toll from his customers, so is every single borrower (i.e. every indebted business) compelled to recreate vis-à-vis the consuming public the conditions between itself and the money-lender (the bank). Therefore, producers will go to unimaginable extremes to shield their products with engineered scarcity, trademarks, monopolies, patents, copyrights, and proprietary arrangements of ever increasing intricacy – that is, they will seek to *extract rents* from the consumption and use of their ideas, insofar as they themselves have to pay money-rents (interest charges) to the banking cartel that sponsored their enterprise; they will try to sell their goods for *more* than they are truly worth, the gauge of the 'mark-up' being, again, basic interest. The entrepreneur-debtor, hard pressed to cover overheads (Urzins) thus pursues, as a rule, a three-pronged routine: cost-reduction, rent-seeking (i.e., create 'scarcity' artificially), and consumerist hype (also known as 'marketing'). In this fashion, interest breeds a never-ending predatory spiral. Hence, the origin of labour exploitation: the case of the employer striving to dispense 'working permits' (jobs) in a regime of exclusivity

(because of which, applicants resignedly accept a dismal pay-scale); hence the sprawling of unsightly architecture ('cheap housing, cheap designs') throughout the West, compared to which personalized carpentry appears as yet another 'luxury of the past'; hence the case of spacious American downtown areas in which no free parking is to be found (i.e., the City eliminates free-parking zones); and a million of other such instances, including the far more disquieting, and yet ominously predictable, temptation to put a price tag on human life or limbs – witness famous Debussy interpreter, pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's insurance contract with Lloyd's to safeguard his 'capital equipment' – namely, *his hands*. All these actuarial calculations are inconceivable without interest. The notion of 'present value' is unthinkable without it.

HERESY ...

Monetary dynamics is a narration of *power*, which, for anarchism, is the affliction that plagues our endeavours to live collectively in peace. This is power that elites exercise locally, by commanding the labour of others, via unearned ('rental') income, which, *by law*, the banking networks channel to them; and power exercised internationally, that is, by the United States and its European satellites over the rest of the world: we recognise it as it spins cross-country upheavals, world poverty, sclerotic growth, and otherwise inexplicable international agreements, laws and counter-laws, and ever more sophisticated financial instruments, matched by our confused neuroses about the overall health of the planet. Subjected to the abuse of monetary imbalances, the economy reacts by displaying symptoms that typically follow arbitrary straining, such as inflationary and deflationary outbreaks. Both effects, in fact, operate concomitantly in our system.

The years go by, and there appears to be no inherent force in our society capable of countering the growth of indebtedness. Indeed, since 1979, finance, with the full institutional backing of the world's most powerful central banks,⁷ has lobbied vigorously to remove any such safeguard from the monetary make-up of our economies. Things are such today that no amount of protest, debt rescheduling and bankruptcy legislation is going to translate into some form of debt-exoneration for the working public as a whole.

As long as economies handle traditional (i.e. imperishable) money, which is

handed over in exchange for an exponentially-growing fee – interest – there can be no flattening out of the so-called business cycle; the two are intimately related. The wage-earners are simply not allotted sufficient purchasing power to satisfy the whole of production, and the employers, via the banks, have the means but certainly not the desire to cover the difference. The standard capitalist palliative, as an over-zealous Thomas Malthus suggested in the early nineteenth century, is to fund a perennial debt by borrowing (the capitalists') money back into circulation, and/or injecting cash via deficit spending. The social outcome of such redistributive makeover, however, is the breeding of an army of unproductive consumers, such as warriors, lawyers, state officials, flunkies and court deacons (like Malthus himself) – all occupations created by the elite, paid for by the working hours of indentured credit-card holders, and further justified by the exigency to protect the profitability of business.⁸ It is no wonder that the ancient Hebrew remission of all debts, to be scheduled at regular seven-times-seven-year intervals – the jubilee – coincides with the end of a Kondratieff cycle, which spans approximately fifty years.

Inflation Clearly, when the mass of the debt, public and private, has attained a dimension such that today roughly a fifth (possibly more)⁹ of people's incomes is channelled toward interest payments, which mature as a matter of arithmetic course upon the looming mass of the principal irrespective of the aggregate dynamics of the economy, the obvious consequence is a *generalized increase in the price level*. On the one hand, producers discharge basic interest upon the selling price.¹⁰ On the other, no matter how proficient central banks may be *in damming consumer markets from the virtual oceans of magnetic money they input into the payments grid in order to feed the debt*, such virtual ciphers will spill over into the sphere of the ordinary consumables. Hence the erosion of our currencies' purchasing power: inflation can at best be contained, but never annulled so long as we depend upon an interest-driven credit machine.

... Trillions of dollars are required to maintain liquidity in financial markets generating slightly more than a hundred billion or sometimes (recently, in corporate stocks) negative amounts of funds [...].¹¹

Deflation Though ours is an inflationary environment, it is nonetheless systematically conditioned by deflationary pressure. Semi-stable as they may have lately

been, we know 1) that *prices* are steadily creeping up (because of inflation), and 2) that, in real terms, they are *high* – in other words, *life is expensive*. In this connection, we should not forget to mention that a ‘structural’ rate of unemployment of *at least* 10 per cent seems to have established itself as the rule in the West (America included).¹² This state of dearth coupled with quasi-immobile net job-creation stems, of course, from the inveterate business practice of restricting output in order to shore up prices, and thereby profits and market capitalisation. The ‘merit’ of the late Neo-Liberal regime is to have ensured the perpetuation of this tacit ‘tradition’, which Veblen denounced as ‘sabotage’,¹³ in a setting that has been somewhat unperturbed by violent oscillations in prices and employment.

So it happened that a mere symbol, a token, a virtual creature – money, which ought to be the most public of all goods – has been appropriated by a cartel of merchants through its initial concentration of gold hoards. The subsequent development of banking could be seen as an impersonal drive to disembodify the notion of time-resistance from its material support: in other words, to extract the ‘power of gold’ from gold itself, as it were. Bankers have systematically endeavoured to rid themselves of the encumbrances of precious metals: they do not seek the propinquity of the yellow metal for its own sake;¹⁴ it is rather *its virtue to command interest* that they strive to distil, and transfer to their books, checks and debit cards.

The magnetic impulses, which the bank sells its customers by mortgaging their belongings and labour, and whose repayment is expected under penalty of pecuniary sanction, court injunction, or apprehension by the bailiff, are still extensions of basic interest. Money should indeed be ‘electronic’, but not ‘sold’ – today it is both.

RUDOLF STEINER

The word heresy comes from the Greek *aíresis*, which means ‘faculty to choose’. Rudolf Steiner – a heretic *sui generis* – claimed that freedom is grasped when the individual gains knowledge through an act of the will: we seize truth because we wish it; in willing to possess a verity, we become unshackled.¹⁵ One such truth was begging the necessity of instituting perishable money.¹⁶ It was intriguing coincidence that this revolutionary notion was simultaneously and independently put forth by the leaders of two different currents of Germany’s communalist stream.

In Steiner’s view, money is an element, like water one may say, that undergoes

transformations. It exists in three qualitatively different forms: as purchase, loan and gift money. Each and severally, these types of money reflect the economic process at different phases, and perform distinct offices.¹⁷

- 1) *Purchase* money is money as we know it, and under which we, erroneously according to Steiner, subsume all forms of pecuniary media. It is money with instant turnover. It is issued against goods that await immediate consumption.
- 2) The moment a *surplus* is formed within a community, so that a bundle of goods (food and materials), accompanied by their corresponding tokens (purchase money), become available for ‘transformation’, purchase money turns into *loan* money: the farmers entrust a craftsman with their ‘savings’. This money will now accompany the saved resources toward their transformation into something qualitatively different: an *investment*.
- 3) Thanks to investment, the surpluses accumulated will be such that a growing portion thereof, which exceeds the needs of the savers, *will be given away*. This juncture is of fundamental importance: a particular money-bill that had started its investment adventure long ago, and which now corresponds to some item of the surplus pool not reinvested in the cycle (because of abundance or rapid obsolescence), is most likely an ‘old note’ – with, say, about a year to ‘live’ before expiration; it is precisely this sort of money that will afford the support of the *gift economy*.

When the *gift economy* – that sector of society consisting of teachers, sculptors, priests, doctors, etc. – consumes its share, the money perishes, and the *associations* in charge of the donations will bring about a process of so-called ‘rejuvenation’ – that is, they ‘burn’ the dying note and issue new money in conjunction with those economic interests at the *origin* of the productive cycle, namely farming (land), followed by industry and craft (tools). Society in Steiner’s vision should consist of a harmonious interplay of three independent, yet coherently entwined, vital systems: laws and rights, economics, and the arts and sciences – his so-called Threefold Commonwealth. Free associations of consumers, traders and producers iron out contrasts and redress imbalances amongst themselves with no resort to litigation. The sphere of the rights, echoing the Platonic moulding of jurisprudence in the City State, would define the tenor of a conduct of business that provokes no affront

to the dignity of the worker. Finally, donation should be free, but one may presume that the process could be made more expeditious with a little help from the laws (liturgies, and mandatory alms). Eventually, the (dying) money is consigned to foundations that decide, under no duress, the destination of the gift.

In the light of everything that has been appraised so far, how can the joint communalist vision of Steiner and Gesell provide the revolutionary means with which to extinguish the toll imposed by eternal money and its associated ills?

As hinted above, Gesell advanced the idea of ‘free’, that is, perishable money (*Freigeld*). Free-money comes essentially in two variants: either as stamp scrip (*Schwundgeld* or *Schrumpfgeld*, ‘depreciative’, perishable certificates), or time-sensitive vouchers (*Ablaufgeld*, expiring-money). Gesell seemed indifferent between the two options, though he confined his discussion to the former, whereas Rudolf Steiner favoured the latter variant. *Stamp scrip* takes the form of a paper certificate that would keep its face value so long as the users would affix a stamp (a so-called demurrage fee)¹⁸ upon it periodically – say, every week, or month. The device is clever, as it is designed to effect two critical and interrelated objectives at once. On the one hand, *it prevents the hoarding of money*, which is the chief mechanism responsible for stagnation and unemployment (i.e., deflation). Notes would only be accepted so long as they would bear the weekly (or monthly) stamp – bills only partially ‘stamped’ would be accepted at a discount; the holder would naturally bear the corresponding loss. On the other hand, this periodical stamping of the note, as it changes hands over the course of a year, functions as a tax levied on the money itself – it is tantamount to a *negative interest* charged on the medium of payment. The economic significance of this expedient is fundamental: this special tax, which, according to Gesell, should have cumulatively amounted to a deduction in the range of 5-12 per cent per annum, represents the *average rate of depreciation* of all the goods traded in the economy during the given cycle. Thus, Gesell reasoned, money-tokens are made to mimic, to reflect the life-cycle of the merchandise which they represent and accompany in the course of multitudinous transactions. Once one of such bills is fully stamped, it is expended one last time, and ‘dies’, the fully paid 5 per cent charge indicating that this one note has fulfilled its circulatory obligations, so to speak, and signalled at the terminal point that our physical stock is being continuously used – as it should, for such are the economic ways of nature. Naturally, a dead bill is replaced by a new one.

Equally effective for Gesell was *Ablaufgeld*, mere paper-certificates bearing an expiration date. The difference with stamp scrip lay mostly in the administrative handling of the money. One could say that of the two types of Free-money, dated bills are by nature more anarchistic, in that they may function without collection agencies selling stamps on behalf of what would be, in fact, a (communally or otherwise) centralised Financial Ministry (or a National Currency Office, as Gesell envisioned it).¹⁹ With dated certificates, as it now indeed happens in several German districts (see below), merchants may double as autonomous minting bureaus, and issue such paper to the extent of, say, one per cent of their stock, with the obvious and perennial objective to energise exchange (sales) and elude to a certain extent banking fees. In this case, the negative 5 per cent interest charge, which may be spread across a wide swathe of spenders with stamp scrip, is sustained almost exclusively by the issuing-businesses themselves as they collect the expiring certificates and replace them with new ones: they call it a 'usage fee' (it is the self-same demurrage device 'incorporated' into the paper), which is from the retailers' standpoint well worth paying in exchange for guaranteed and steady sales.

Money that is not advanced in exchange for interest generates *no debt*. Therefore, there will be no compulsion to roll over debts and command *inflationary* issuances of cash to support the interest payments that emanate from them. On the other hand, the built-in no-hoarding provision, by forcing circulation, staves off *deflationary* counter-forces and ends up freeing the full productive potential of the community. As a result of an orderly and industrious surge of activity, stocks of all goods will be so increased that the *rate* of return on investment will be gradually *driven to zero*. This is not to say that individuals may not become prosperous with free-money; quite the opposite, in fact: the novelty lies in the realisation that, unencumbered by the obligation to remit interest, developers, for instance, would no longer be impelled to curb the expansion of housing in order to extort high prices from the public, with which to cover overhead (interest charges). More houses, more things would thus be produced, and incomes and wealth for the community as a whole would be augmented as a consequence.

Unlike Gesell, whose activist impatience compelled him to think still in terms of a centralised minting bureau, the no less reform-anxious Steiner kept his anarchist cool, so to speak, by focusing rather on the articulated cooperation of a network of *associations*. In his view, these bodies would coordinate policy, iron out inefficiencies,

and monitor attentively the itinerary of money: from its natural source, agriculture, to its terminus, the arts and sciences, by way of manufacturing. In this sense, each regional minting office would have to be a tri-articulated institution structured according to the 'ages of money', in which, in the best classical tradition, the pre-eminent role would be reserved for the councillors of the spiritual sphere – as in the temple of Athena, where the priests would mint the owl on the coins of the city.

Translating the concept of time-sensitive money into the binary idiom of modern-day electronic circuits presents no difficulty. With proper legal dispositions, banks could be made to implement the reform at once. The checking account, upon which individuals will draw with magnetic debit cards, would then become the receptacle of free-money. An average depreciation levy, which would be calculated by a bureau of statistics by evaluating the ratio of goods to services and that of durables to perishables, could be accordingly imposed on it, daily, weekly, or even in real time. Whatever is not spent on ordinary transactions may be deposited in a savings account. How is one to save with dying money? Simple. Once the savings are entrusted to the banks, it becomes the bankers' responsibility to consign these funds to capable entrepreneurs, *who have thus the task of fighting depreciation in the customers' stead*. In this sense, a zero-interest rate still represents a viable proposition for the savers, who are thereby guaranteed: 1) a profusion of investment thanks to the no-hoarding condition; and 2) the security of seeing the face value of their nest egg preserved through time.

THE TRIALS OF REGIONAL CURRENCIES

Nowadays, most, if not all, regional schemes implemented in Germany and European surroundings have been direct filiations of Steiner's and Gesell's original intuitions.

Organizations to diffuse time-dated money were set up in Germany as early as 1919, in concomitance with Gesell's personal drive to see this reform through. But it was not until 1931 (one year after Gesell had died), in times of acute crisis, that such organisations aroused general notice. Chronologically, the first successful experiment with Gesellian stamp scrip was attempted at this time by a mine owner, Herr Hebecker, in the Bavarian coal town of Schwanenkirchen. For over two years the mine had been closed and 'the village had barely existed by means of the dole'. Hebecker, who had previously heard of the Gesellian associations, resolved to

apply the concept. Shortly thereafter the results were reported to be ‘miraculous’, so much so that the town’s revival made world headlines. There were essentially two reasons why the solution worked instantly: first, the size of the community, which counted a mere 500 persons; and, second, the self-contained nature of such a community: Schwanenkirchen was an economic microcosm, orbiting around its coal mine. With perfect economic logic, as seen from Steiner’s angle, it was the individual responsible for operations at the ‘base’ – earth’s powers of sustenance, i.e., the mine – that convinced retailers to accept the scrip with which the miners were going to be paid.²⁰ Retailers, in turn, persuaded wholesalers and the local wholesalers managed to pass the scrip across regional boundaries. And so business was revived rapidly throughout the region as it pulled itself along a new chain of solidarity. Inevitably, some notes swam all the way up to the regional offices of the Reichsbank. The success was so swift and threatening that the Reich had to forbid stamp scrip by means of an emergency law, claiming that it represented an illegal usurpation of a government prerogative.²¹ One year after Schwanenkirchen, the mayor of Wörgl introduced Gesellian money into this Austrian township, itself palsied by an unemployment rate of nearly 50 per cent. As communal employees, led by the mayor, agreed to receive half their salaries paid in scrip, while emergency workers took 100 per cent in that form, economic activity flourished again. Not only were past obligations fulfilled by means of the emergency money, but significant public projects were carried out into the bargain.²²

The scrip functioned and it could not have been otherwise. These were intelligent provisions: demurrage fee (the stamp tax); a ‘conversion’ fee greater than the monthly money-tax (as was the case in Wörgl) to discourage the people’s early and precipitate exchange of stamp scrip back into ‘official’ schillings; patronage (at least one bank and several businesses sponsoring the proposal); guaranteed reflux (acceptance of the scrip for tax payments); and local commitment (a local note could only be spent, at least initially, ‘locally’). Then reformers could dream on and envision their scrip travelling to a neighbouring borough, and from there to another, *ad libitum* until the banking network could be altogether bypassed with a parallel web of mutual credit and partnership.

Given the seventy-year hiatus that separates these original experiments from the late surge of regional initiatives, the chronicles of Schwanenkirchen and Wörgl have risen to the status of mythical antecedents in the general patrimony

of communal reform. Owing to these roots, it is no accident that today Germany is at the forefront of the reformist impetus. According to a recent survey, there are nearly thirty different regional currency schemes in Germany,²³ and several more are in the works (roughly fifty other projects). Most notable amongst these so-called ‘complementary currencies’ are Magdeburg’s Urstromtaler and the Chiemgauer,²⁴ both of which have received media exposure, as well as Düsseldorf’s Rheingold and the Freie Deutsch Mark (FDM) of Frankfurt. All these certificates, with the exception of the Chiemgauer, which is a re-edition of pure Gesellian stamp scrip, are time-dated vouchers.²⁵ Jost Reinert’s Rheingold exchange-ring, as an add-on feature, promotes local artists by reproducing their works on the notes. The money tax charged on these currencies varies between 3 and 8 per cent, 5 per cent being the norm. When allowed, an additional fee is added for redemption in euros. The exchange rate with the euro is set by some issuers at 1:1, and by others, keenly fearful of central banking’s inflationary proclivity, at 2 euros for 1 ‘regio’.²⁶ The Chiemgauer, for instance, is the brainchild of a former teacher of a Steiner-Waldorf school; this particular currency is presently accepted in 550 shops and relies on a minting network of 40 offices.

These are promising beginnings. The overall volume of business moved by complementary currencies is still very small, however, and not all such schemes have been blessed with start-up success – Giessen’s Justus, for example, recently folded. The obstacles on the path to diffuse implementation are several: first and foremost is the rival power of the incumbent banking system, confidently reliant as it is on a vast, capillary network of payments and commercial links, which has been implanted, developed and laid out with dedication and experience for the past several centuries. Second is the globalisation of supply, which has progressively deprived communal nuclei of legal and economic clout, thereby transforming retailing into the highly centralised, hub-and-spokes format of the warehouse-style supermarkets. Finally, the exclusivism with which certain of these experiments were born has confined their currencies to being an upper-middle-class luxury, incapable by nature of overstepping the restricted boundaries of privilege.

Although these are daunting hurdles, the damages perpetrated by the prevailing economic establishment have been hitherto deemed sufficiently profound as to elicit regional initiatives all over the world. Activists try to monitor these develop-

ments as best as they can, and so far they have reckoned that approximately 165 full-fledged local exchange systems have been launched in 28 countries.²⁷ Interesting happenings have also been afoot on the American continent.²⁸

Fully-funded currencies like the Toronto Dollars (the plan was initiated in 1998), for instance, are backed by Canadian bank-money to the extent of a hundred per cent;²⁹ they feature a ten per cent discount fee for 'redemption' (i.e., conversion into legal tender),³⁰ have a course of two years, and are redeemed nine times out of ten – the unredeemed ten per cent, along with the cash retained for earlier redemption through discount is devoted to charitable endowments: namely, gift money.

What one observes in this case is a mimicking of the 'perishable-money' model. Against the background of traditional monetary rule, certain local constituencies appear to have been granted the liberty to reclaim from commercial banking slivers of the economic landscape. Presumably, corporate banking interests are willing to brook such concessions if the overall business profitability in a semi-depressed enclave is such that the option of 1) loaning it a large sum for, say, the backing of fully-funded scrip, and that of 2) loaning it an inferior amount for customary business (earning proportionately more interest through higher turnover), are equally lucrative. In this sense, the circulation of fully-backed scrip like the Toronto Dollar, even if it carries the Gesellian demurrage device, amounts to no more than a partial victory of the communal interests, for the banking cartel can bring a rapid end to the scheme, should it resolve to do so on a whim, by recalling the backing issue (of imperishable dollars).

Further examples of 'true community currencies' are the various systems of barter, swap and mutual credit attempted in the past decades, including Ithaca HOURS, LETS (Local Exchange and Trading System), and THANKYOU.³¹ Such media have functioned with varying degrees of success. Since 1991, *HOUR Town*, a local tabloid in Ithaca, NY, has issued scrip to businesses that bought advertising space in cash; advertisers would publicise their willingness to transact in scrip, and receive a participatory (flat) premium in Ithaca HOURS for goodwill – this scheme is thus somewhat of a hybrid, for the scrip is loosely covered. One HOUR is symbolically equivalent to an hour's work, that is, circa ten official US dollars. Following a brisk resumption of activity, the arrangement turned into a full-bodied outfit, inclusive of non-profit status, a board of direc-

tors, and facilities for the allocation of loans and grants. The Ithaca scrip affords no stipulation for demurrage (depreciation charge for perishability), however, and there appears to be no methodical equilibration between issuance and reciprocity: it is not the businesses, or associations thereof, that print the certificates, but the newspaper, which, therefore, acts mostly as a bureau of minting and printing, and qualifies as an issuer proper only when it accepts the scrip in payment for advertising space.³²

The regional swap network of the LETS has had mixed results, the chief problem being lack of business involvement. The individual is the issuer of LETS, and mutual cooperation amongst participants is relied upon to redress chronic imbalances, whereas a THANKYOU is a loosely quantified obligation – an acknowledgment of receipt – to reciprocate services rendered and goods acquired at a discount on a members-only sub-loop of the world wide web, hosted in California, called *Friendly Favors*, launched in 1999. This virtual league appears to be an etherealization of the gift economy: above a certain amount of THANKYOUS, a 1% demurrage charge is deducted from monthly balances, and a 10% ‘tithing’ of all THANKYOUS is melted into non-profit endowments – a gift within the gift.

Indeed, with our mind’s eye, we find ourselves surveying the whole spectrum of monetary possibilities: from an early story of time-sensitive bills issued by a Mr. Hebecker in conjunction with coal, down to the last stage of an affluent region’s bazaar of requital, California’s *Friendly Favors*. From free-money to gift money, via savings by way of loan money at zero per cent interest: Gesell and Steiner in one. And the people seem to know already, intuitively, how it all works; what free-money therefore needs is the proper humus – a Threefold Social Commonwealth will do, the rest is child’s play.

... AND SURRENDER

On at least four notable occasions in the last nine years, spokespersons of the investing interests have come out in the open to tackle the notion of dying money. Between 1999 and 2003 America’s and Britain’s central banks sponsored research papers in which not only was Gesell mentioned by name, but his ‘carry tax’ on money was canvassed as a viable remedial tool for overcoming the macroeconomic

difficulties of the day. This was rather jolting: imagine Cardinal Bellarmino calling on Galileo for an astrological reading. Utterly galvanised, certain factions within Germany's Gesellian tribe thought they were seeing at last the hand of banking outstretched toward them, offering collaboration.

But appearances were deceptive, alas. Sure enough, at the turn of the third millennium, central banks were worried, as we saw earlier, by the low level of interest rates that had settled after the dotcom tumble. The rates were so low, in fact, that, shorn of inflation, they were approximately equal to zero. It so came to pass that monetary policy, as the authorities lamented, was stuck in the 'liquidity trap' of the 'zero-interest-bound': in other words, the system found itself powerless to revive aggregate demand by means of fiscal expansion – i.e. by selling Treasury bonds, whose rock-bottom yields offered no incentive to investors: rates were such that it made virtually no difference whether one held wealth in cash or T-bills. This was Gesell's classic deflationary scenario, in which banks, replete with cash, forbear from investing it for lack of profitable opportunity – which is to say, that so long as money is not guaranteed a real remuneration of at least 4 per cent or so (Urzins, basic interest), it withdraws in the virtual recesses of the network in wait for brisker times. Meanwhile, folk ain't workin'.

At the time, a few publicists recommended that central banks go on printing money freely and cause thereby a *big inflation*. Inflation, by eroding the purchasing power of the hoarded money, would hopefully flush its owners from the brush of inactivity, forcing them to dis-hoard the cash and spend it.³³ Clearly, what was being groped for in this case was a *negative rate of interest* – precisely Gesell's tax, which would yet be induced underhandedly, as it were, by causing the rate of inflation to exceed the going rate of interest. The hoarding masses would thus find themselves coerced to 'take refuge' into spending the dollars they has so carefully treasured. Yet, central banks, which by nature abhor generalised inflation, can never approve of so entropic a suggestion. All the more so – and this was the crux of the issue – as an accelerated injection of liquidity into the world markets might have unnerved domestic, and especially *foreign* investors, and prompted them to unload billions' worth of US Treasury bills, with the well-known and parlous consequences that the United States had sworn to itself since 1979 never to witness again.

The opening shot was the Bank of England's, which in 1999 preconised the imposition of a negative tax on currency, expecting thereafter that the banks them-

selves would apply it on deposits.³⁴ The following year a paper of the Richmond branch of the Federal Reserve called for the same option, *in conjunction with aggressive purchases on the part of the central bank of long-term Treasuries*, whose higher rates still offered some room for manoeuvre (i.e., being higher than zero, they could still fall).³⁵ In light of these policies, it was hoped that the private sector would ‘adjust’: lower long-term yields would be counted on to spur the public’s inclination to dis-save and consume, while higher bond prices would generate capital gains, which could also stimulate the investors’ consumption. By 2003, when the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas addressed once more the issue of the zero-bound, there seemed, however, to be no longer any fancy of toying with the Gesellian remedy, which was dismissed as ‘bold but impractical’: the Fed had finally deliberated that no anti-deflationary cure other than the policy of open market operations involving long-term debt would be contemplated for the purpose.³⁶

In the end, of course, nothing came of this strange brainstorming interlude in the Gesellian key. But what had been the meaning of it? And had central banking *really* been courting heresy?

Not quite. The reason for envisaging such a radical solution at that particular time hinged, as always, on America’s capital imperative to stand as the world’s clearing union and unchallenged financial market (see Part 1 of this Essay, Vol. 17:1): the power to attract capital to Wall Street is, as we’ve argued, the *sine qua non* for maintaining such a position of world command. Seeing the post-dotcom economy bogged down by zero-interest rates, and a dollar that was not weak, yet not strong enough to do anything about it, a segment of central bank analysts must have been pressured to come up with some sort of clever policy twist, and ended up by unearthing pell-mell Gesell’s heterodox medicament.

So, clearly, by means of this ‘bold’ device, the hypothetical plan was to attract to the financial and physical markets of the United States liquidity that had, for the time being, vanished ‘underground.’ In this connection, the Bank of England speculated, most interestingly, that a carry tax on US dollars, 70 per cent of which are held abroad, would also bring in significant revenue from the chests of foreign investors and central banks (‘external seignorage’), as well as from the *criminal economy* – itself invoicing most of its transactions in greenbacks.³⁷

Indeed, the overall turnover of organised crime is estimated to be worth more than 2 trillion dollars per annum, over 900 billions of which is claimed by

narcotics alone;³⁸ and this is not to mention arms and global tax evasion (elusion of the gift), both being, with insignificant exceptions, cash trades of extraordinary magnitude. For instance, most US \$100 bills are shipped in bales by the Fed across the world to Russia. As a rule, the central bank pays the US Treasury four cents per manufactured bill and resells it at face value: when queried by the FBI about patterns of money laundering, the Fed is generally uncooperative.³⁹

The banking grid is not in the dark as far as these flows are concerned, quite the opposite. Tax havens operate as the invisible nodes of the network; they are the cash vaults of the black economy, forming the switchboard of a vast interface plugging the 'clean' West to the 'dirty' South by way of intoxicants, fiscal delinquency, weapons, and slavery.

The banking network does not yet appear to want 'free-money': on this occasion, it had merely been claiming its cash back. Shortly after the Dallas paper, talk of zero-bound quicksand and stamp scrip quieted down as fast as it came – and for good reason, considering that in 2003, as the housing bubble had been rapidly inflating, foreign monies had come pouring in once again.

To dispel any doubts as to banking's instinctive hostility to Gesellian economics, one need only consider the latest instalment of this official brush between perishability and traditional bank-money in the form of a 50-page report on Germany's regional currencies commissioned in 2006 from a local academic by Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank. This is an interesting document, not so much for its contents as for its organisation, which is taken up for the most part with entirely futile mathematical toy-models pretending to 'prove' the wrongness of the concept underlying regional currencies. Thus, after having cooked up terrifying estimates of the welfare loss putatively entailed by a wider diffusion of regional currencies, the author concludes his report with a hopeful note remarking that we need not yet worry, for this phenomenon remains 'negligibly small'. More than anything, this very document, with its virtual absence of institutional argumentation, and the somewhat supercilious tone of the exposition, which is the natural complement to the critique's inconsequence, is the symptom of a general sense of unease on the part of the banking community in view of what it perceives as encroachment.⁴⁰

The public's apprehension of all things monetary is today no less than yesterday, a shambles. Most individuals, who handle money daily as a matter of course,

do not know why they pay interest, where interest comes from, how money is created, what its relationship is to gold, or, say, what a central bank essentially is and does.

The poor generally don't know [who the Governor of the Fed is] while the middle class doesn't understand him. Too many Americans don't have a clue as to what he does, an ignorance that the Federal Reserve [has] always preferred, even cultivated, and will likely continue to prefer and cultivate.⁴¹

The desire on the part of its chief managers to make money an arcanum has logically elicited the need for a ponderous propagandistic apparatus, whose 'informative/educational' duties have been shared more or less equally by the press and academia. As known, the throughput of 'economic commentary' issuing from both organs for the past fifty years has been positively overwhelming. What this flooding of information has accomplished is to have obscured the monetary question further by bringing into higher relief pre-existing strands of an historical debate that has revolved around method rather than substance. It is the merit of Polanyi's classic analysis in *The Great Transformation* to have established that all great institutional clashes that have punctuated the development of capitalism have been primarily waged by the two leading factions of Liberalism itself – namely, 'the so-called 'progressives' (or 'liberals') and 'the conservatives'. Which is to say that the validity of the monetary establishment as such has never been, and is never to be questioned; what is allowed, instead, is to argue about how best to manage it. And in this sense – as bluntly exemplified by American politics – the choice appears mechanically confined to either the progressive, so-called 'Keynesian' option of governmental (part-time) intrusion into the entrepreneurial field; or the conservative, 'Republican' preference for an unbridled plutocratic privatisation of all assets and the concomitant relegation of the State to the role of a surplus-commissioning buffer. Of course, things in reality have never been so dichotomous, for the system has been wont to display at all times shifting arrangements that have been the endless and convoluted fruit of compromise between the two positions.

Money-wise, the ironies of our story are droll enough in that, no matter how eager professional economists have been either to slight or ridicule the notion of time-dated money, the latter had actually been taken seriously by the respective

patron saints of the two schools of thought. The liberals' idol, J. M. Keynes (1883-1946) of Cambridge University, congenitally incapable of coming up with an original concept of his own – let alone a simple, powerful theory of interest – literally stole Gesell's. Though he clearly saw that he could profitably manipulate the heuristic value of the Gesellian insight, according to which business paralysis is caused by profit rates sinking below basic interest, Keynes appeared to have feared the radicalism of stamp scrip, which he discarded on grounds of impracticality, again.⁴² On the conservative corner of the Liberal sandlot, Irving Fisher (1867-1947) of Yale University was, instead, an enthusiastic advocate of Gesell's scrip as an emergency device, yet a detractor of his theory of interest: Fisher did not believe that the introduction of 'free-money' could possibly lead to the abolition of interest.⁴³ Thus cloven, the Gesellian file has been laid to rest, years ago, at an awkward angle. And, certainly, it is also from these early, partial endorsements that have issued those odd programmatic papers from central banks on the 'zero-interest-bound'.

All of these factors, together with the late condemnation of the idea by the Bundesbank, make for a landscape that no interested citizen could not but find extraordinarily confusing. In the sphere of monetary belief, the faiths up for adoption just seem to be too many, and the disagreement reigning over and among them is complete. By way of conclusion, let us then briefly review the major strains presently available on the 'market of ideas' aside from the communal option:

1) In command position we find the (central) bankers, who have had the option of waking up on either the Keynesian or the (hawkish) inflation-fighting side of their bed depending on the political exigency of the day. These wish essentially to perfect a system of managed, virtual fiat money, which is made to act as if it were gold, without being cumbered, however, by the physical and extractive constraints of the yellow metal. This is the financial appendage proper of today's power structure. And, as it is to be expected, nine out of ten words of all writings devoted to the money question are drafted in its defence.

Alan Greenspan has testified before Congress that 'a central bank properly functioning will endeavor to, in many cases, replicate what a gold standard would itself generate'.⁴⁴

The other strains are represented, properly speaking, by fringe movements:

2) Gnawing curmudgeonly at the peripheral branches of the banking keep, the depleted swarms of so-called *gold-bugs* offer a curious spectacle. Much as the monarchists of yore would self-righteously navigate the Republic's conservative mainstream, yet without ever disowning the golden idols of days gone by (i.e. King & Country), modern-day advocates of a Gold Standard pose as the Right's puritanical wing in monetary matters. In their 'Libertarian' view, only a strict return to a system of money-issuance tied to a tangible stock of noble metal can cure fiat money of its inflationary dissipations. Especially since the presidency of Reagan, a closet bug himself,⁴⁵ and indubitably lifted by the infinite ambiguity of central banking's relationship to gold, the bullion aficionados have managed to retain a foothold in the arena. This they have achieved by occasionally producing sharp critiques of current monetary policy,⁴⁶ and, most importantly, by turning diffuse popular resentment against banking's monopoly to their advantage with the not unsuccessful launch in the United States of a private barter system animated by a silver/gold coinage called the Liberty Dollar.⁴⁷ The endorsement of the latter scheme by presidential candidate Ron Paul,⁴⁸ whose effigy was thankfully engraved on a special edition of the network's coins,⁴⁹ not to mention the sensational raid by the FBI on the Indiana branch of the association and the concomitant sequestration of its gold and silver hoards in November 2007,⁵⁰ have doubtless strengthened the gold-bugs in their conviction. Though they have thus managed, like Germany's regional currencies, to make themselves a nuisance in the eyes of the banking interests, it remains nonetheless true that the gold-bugs' nostalgic recidivism represents a serious drag on the reformist élan. The problem, of course, is their institutional blindness, so to speak: it is as if they wilfully ignore *that the system we have is a perfectly consequent evolution of a monetary standard originally harnessed to gold*, which they anachronistically fetishise. The quintessential illustration of this reality is indeed the tenure of ex-Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan (1987–2005), who, from being an ardent bullionist went on to become one of fiat money's most appreciated stewards: the transition was splendidly consistent, and yet the gold-bugs stubbornly refuse to see it thus, choosing instead, daftly, to condemn the likes of Greenspan as traitors.⁵¹

3) Not long ago, an even more marginal segment of the free-market diehards had been floating the notion of 'free-banking', which implies the competitive issuance of (imperishable) dollars by rival business concerns. This is the mad dream of wanting to see a flurry of 'corporate mints' – say, General Electric's, Citigroup's, Coca-Cola's, along with the national government's – all of them competing for the public's patronage of their 'proprietary dollars'. Here we witness yet another variation of this school's imaginary crusade against the bugaboo of public administration for the sake of corporate supremacy, for which, intimately, they always perorate. This proposal, in light of its irrelevance, need not detain our discussion much longer for we have already explained that: a) non-financial corporations *do* indeed spawn, when conditions allow it, financial subsidiaries; b) money is managed by a peculiar, *private* cartel, not a public one; and c) cutthroat competition resolves, with varying delay, into oligopolistic equilibration, which is what the world has. The status quo *is* a fair approximation of the status desired by free-marketeers, but again, fanatical Liberals, good monarchist utopians that they are, will not suffer to speak of their archetype – the Free-Market – in other than asymptotic imagery: they have been given Eden on earth, but the true-believers still believe 'tis much too regulated.⁵²

A final note on the current slump (December '09). With the popping of the latest bubble – that of the subprime mortgage loans in mid-September 2008 (see part 1 of this article) – we have now been breathing an air of deep crisis for over a year. While the optimists pray for the next boom – one likely to be spurred by the new faith in 'cleantech'⁵³ – businesses and individuals in the USA, for instance, have yet again formed or revived networks to print their own money. And so we hear of 'Detroit Cheers', North Carolina's 'Plenty', or Western Massachusetts' 'BerkShares': anew, businesses, like improvised minting offices, are printing locally-denominated bills, which they hand out to customers at a discount of 5 per cent to spend within a pool of affiliated stores.⁵⁴ Concomitantly, amidst calls for 'abolishing the currency', the academic stewards of the banking system have predictably resurfaced to conjure the heresy of 'negative interest rates'.⁵⁵ Indeed, a Harvard economics professor and advisor to former President George W. Bush pleaded once more, in the spring of '09, for the introduction of a semi-jocose spin on the Gesellian device. In truth, it is always demanding not to witness with exhilarated fascination these

orthodox custodians of the capitalist order invoking anarchist wisdom each time their house is on fire:

What is the best way for an economy to escape a recession? [...] Lower interest rates encourage households and businesses to borrow and spend [...]. Why shouldn't the Fed just keep cutting interest rates? Why not lower the target interest rate to, say, negative 3 per cent? At that interest rate, you could borrow and spend \$100 and repay \$97 next year. This opportunity would surely generate more borrowing and aggregate demand. The problem with negative interest rates, however, is quickly apparent: nobody would lend on those terms [...]. Unless, that is, we figure out a way to make holding money less attractive [...]. Imagine [then] that the Fed were to announce that, a year from today, it would pick a digit from zero to 9 out of a hat. All currency with a serial number ending in that digit would no longer be legal tender. Suddenly, the expected return to holding currency would become negative 10 per cent [...]. The idea of making money earn a negative return is not entirely new. In the late 19th century, the German economist Silvio Gesell argued for a tax on holding money.⁵⁶

Let us surrender then, surrender to the fact that the present-day system is not yet a truly benevolent, equitable one. And surrender to the realisation that any eventual success that might be reaped by the promoters of regional, time-sensitive currencies will most likely come at the cost of great effort in view of the prejudices, the inertia and the massive resistance respectively opposed by our societies' academes, public habits and vested interests. Though, of course, it need not be so: we are certainly entitled to hope that forward-looking circles within government, banking and business will understand and rally to the cause, thereby facilitating immensely what appears now a necessary, yet daunting endeavour.

This is only a wish. But, regardless of what 'others' will do, all citizens animated by a true desire for peace, communalism and social justice should join forces to search for avenues that may render such an idea universal.

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Anarchism and the politics of affinity groups

Francis Dupuis-Déri

ABSTRACT

Anarchists have been active in the movement for global justice since it began. The influence of anarchism upon the movement consists in large part in the diffusion of egalitarian forms of organisation and actions such as those of the affinity group, an autonomous militant unit of about 5-to-20 individuals. The decision-making process is anarchist, that is to say, it is egalitarian, participatory, deliberative and consensual. After a discussion about the historical origin of the 'affinity group' in anarchist Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as its diffusion via the new social movements of the 1970s through the 1980s until the movement for global justice, the text analyses the political potential of this kind of militant organisation and advances the thesis that it permits a mass movement to function during street actions in a rational, egalitarian and free manner.

Key words *affinity groups, anti-globalisation, social movement, anarchism, deliberation*

ANARCHISM AND THE POLITICS OF AFFINITY GROUPS

Anarchists have been active in the movement for global justice since it began. We find them in Chiapas at the side of the Zapatistas soon after the insurrection of January 1, 1994. We find them in Geneva in May 1998, amongst members of the Peoples' Global Action celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by shattering the windows of businesses emblematic of global capitalism. Nevertheless, it was not until the Battle of Seattle on November

30, 1999 that the anarchist presence at the heart of the movement was more widely recognised. The 'affinity groups' of the Direct Action Network (DAN) blocked access to the conference centre and, using tactics of non-violent civil disobedience, resisted assaults by the police. Approximately four hours after the first DAN action, members of a 'Black Bloc',¹ masked and dressed in black, targeted the windows of MacDonald's restaurants, of Nike and Gap stores, and of banks.²

The diversity and depth of the anarchist influence in the 'anti-globalisation' movement, also known as the movement for global justice or the movement of movements, is evident not only in the streets, but also in the global structure of the movement,³ its alternative media,⁴ its artistic output,⁵ as well as the autonomous campsites set up alongside social forums and counter-summits.⁶ The discourse of the movement for global justice is saturated with references to 'participatory democracy'. Yet it is those who identify themselves as anarchists, as well as other anti-authoritarian activists commonly labelled as 'radicals', who more than anyone else encourage the participation and the autonomy of militants. Within the global movement, anarchism expresses itself through horizontal, participatory, deliberative and consensual decision-making processes.

The affinity group is one of the organisational structures that allow anarchist principles to be embodied in practices and actions. An affinity group is an autonomous militant unit generally made up of between five-to-twenty individuals who share a sense of the causes worth defending and of the types of actions they prefer to engage in. The decision-making process is anarchist, that is to say, egalitarian, participatory, deliberative and consensual. Political or social organisations can – in principle – adopt and adapt this militant form of organisation. In the context of the end of the late 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century, it has been used most notably by anti-authoritarian militants – whether self-proclaimed 'anarchists' or not. The spread of this mode of organisation located at the heart of the movement has enlarged the influence of anarchism, even if those who have recourse to it do not necessarily identify themselves as 'anarchists'. In this study, I will first examine the historical origin of the 'affinity group' in anarchist Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, and its diffusion via the new social movements of the 1970s, through to the 1980s and the movement for global justice. I will then analyse the political potential of this kind of militant organisation. Finally, I will advance the thesis that this structure makes it possible for a

mass movement to function in a rational, egalitarian and free manner. Throughout this investigation, I draw upon a wide range of sources, not only from writings in political philosophy and political history, but also from interviews with activists that I conducted in France and North-America while a participant-observer in the movement for global justice.

THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF AFFINITY GROUPS

The affinity group first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century within the Spanish anarchist movement, in line with Mikhail Bakunin's call for the creation of 'intimate circles'.⁷ In the Spain of the 1870s and 1880s, small circles of friends already known as *grupos de afinidad* or as *tertulias* (circles, clubs or assemblies) gathered together in cafés to debate ideas, to prepare future actions, and to share news (reading newspapers aloud was an important practice due to the high rate of illiteracy).

At the beginning of the 1920s, henchmen inside the *Sindicatos Libres* who were in the employ of the bosses launched a wave of assassinations of militants of the radical union, the National Workers' Confederation (CNT). In response, anarchists formed self-defence affinity groups. In July 1927, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) was founded clandestinely in Valencia. It was composed of affinity groups whose affiliation with the FAI remained informal, as there were neither membership cards nor obligatory dues. Relationships between members rested upon intimacy and confidence, and the decision to admit new members was taken collectively. The Federation of Locals and Districts, which had no decision-making power, organised regional meetings of groups (or of one or two of their representatives), often in the form of country picnics. But according to an anarchist member of the FAI of that time, 'each group within the FAI thought and acted as it saw fit, without concerning itself with what the other groups might think or decide, because there was no inter-group discipline as was the case with communist cells of the same region'.⁸

The notion of affinity groups was also used by anarchists outside of Spain. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the anarchists of Argentina – often hailing from Europe – also had affinity groups.⁹ In France, in 1931, the anarchist individualist Émile Armand, in a text devoted to the experiments of autonomous and free

communes, noted that these functioned much better if they were the result of a 'grouping by affinity'.¹⁰ Thus, when evaluated in the light of the resurgence of affinity groups, the influence of anarchism in the global movement for social justice has deep historical roots.

The practice of affinity groups was nevertheless rare in the years after the Civil War (1936-39), when Spanish anarchism was bloodily repressed. Yet there is no doubt that Spanish anarchist refugees living in Toulouse and elsewhere perpetuated this form of organisation in the pursuit of their political activities. The same is true of the International Brigades veterans, who took the practice of affinity groups back to their countries of origin in North America and elsewhere. It also appears that American militants in the War Resisters' League, a pacifist organisation with anarchist leanings, founded in the 1920s, were familiar with 'affinity groups'. The far Left of the 1940s and 1950s was nevertheless affected by the hegemony of highly authoritarian Marxist-Leninist organisations, which did not favour the expansion of autonomous affinity groups. Such groups reappeared in a significant way during the 1960s and 1970s, principally in the United States and West Germany. The sociologist and militant George Katsiaficas recalls that he went to demonstrations with his 'affinity group' during the 1960s.¹¹

Affinity groups should not, however, be associated exclusively with anarchism. There have been various influences, users, and promoters of the affinity group structure in the United States – some yet to be brought to light, and others likely to remain anonymous. For example, the sociologist Barbara Epstein states that the practice of affinity groups was popularised in the United States in the 1960s by Quakers – those partisans of consensus¹² – as well as by Murray Bookchin, a militant anarchist and historian of the Spanish Civil War, through his book *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971).¹³ Furthermore, consciousness-raising groups, a key feature of the so-called second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, were in many cases similar to affinity groups, except that they were seldom involved as collective units in protest actions. In the United States, the Movement for a New Society (MNS), firmly rooted in traditions of non-violent action, played a key role in promoting an array of participatory techniques, including affinity groups, in the fight against nuclear power and other campaigns. While an anarchist sensibility or at least anarchist tendencies certainly existed in radical feminism, the MNS, and the anti-nuclear movement, these forces were neither explicitly nor exclusively

anarchist. Yet major anti-nuclear and pacifist mobilisations account for hundreds of affinity groups that set up camps on the construction sites of nuclear plants and engaged in acts of civil disobedience leading to hundreds of voluntary arrests.¹⁴ According to a Dutch militant active during the 1980s [V9],¹⁵ the Autonomous Movement¹⁶ in West Germany functioned in a similar manner, organising militant anti-nuclear camps where the 'base group' constituted the smallest unit. This was somewhat different from affinity groups insofar as it was an outgrowth of a permanent collective linked to a town or a neighbourhood, and only its spokesperson could speak during assemblies. Already at that time, militants on both sides of the Atlantic had adapted the *modus operandi* of affinity groups inherited from the previous generation according to their political and tactical needs, using affinity groups during mass mobilisations, where they acted as a unifying force.

The organisation of affinity groups was again taken up during the 1980s and 1990s by feminist organisations, ecologists and AIDS activists such as Act Up!, which then became vehicles for the spread of the affinity group model. The concept of the affinity group has even gained popularity beyond the social movements. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have clearly shown how the 'system' co-opted the organisational models and ideological principles of self-management and autonomy found in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This dynamic of piracy between the social movements and the 'system' is still operative.¹⁷ In the United States the concept and even the term 'affinity group' has been adopted and adapted by banks, business schools, universities – including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)¹⁸ – and the State Department. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), to cite one example, maintains that 'affinity groups' allow 'the maximisation of participation' and 'facilitate branching out and communication'.¹⁹ The State Department, for its part, encourages its employees to join affinity groups for 'Asians', 'Blacks', 'gays and lesbians' or 'handicapped' people.²⁰ The affinity group as a mode of organisation is consistent with the new spirit of capitalism articulated by management literature that exhorts managers to promote horizontal structures, self-managing teams, and individual autonomy and creativity. The reality in most workplaces is a far cry from this. Nevertheless, the rhetoric regarding employee autonomy and empowerment reflects an ongoing struggle between the dynamism

of self-management (because workers and middle range managers are far more inspired when they make decisions themselves) and the desire of organisational elites to maintain their power. The elites are thus compelled to keep self-management under control or use it as a means to increase the satisfaction of employees and managers and, hence, their loyalty and devotion to the firm. Contrary to anarchist affinity groups, however, such corporate affinity groups are not autonomous, since they are created by the institution and then proposed to its staff. The introduction of such corporate affinity groups is, in other words, a top-down process. Aside from the 'affinity group' label and a few declarations of principles, these corporate groups have almost nothing in common with the anarchist tradition.

The affinity group approach seems also to have spread throughout the movement for global justice, although its importance varies considerably from place to place. In Italy, a call was launched on the internet for the creation of affinity groups that would plan and carry out non-violent direct actions during the protest against the G8 Summit, in Genoa, in July 2001.²¹ In France, the affinity group method was rarely tried before the mobilisations against the G8 in Évian in June 2003. A member of the Confédération nationale du travail (CNT) has nevertheless remarked that the French 'autonomes' 'function like "affinity groups", without recourse to said label' [CNT1]. In the countries of Central Europe, such as Croatia, the movement for global justice is composed principally of anarchists who are familiar with the principle of affinity groups but do not apply it in a formal way [according to GA9]. Elsewhere, diverse militant organisations that conduct mobilisation campaigns encourage demonstrators to form affinity groups. In preparation for the Summit of the Americas, *Résiste!*, a newspaper put out by the CLAC (Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Montreal) specified that 'it is important for affinity groups to be formed well in advance in order to ensure efficient communication and a democratic decision-making process'.²² The spread of affinity groups is even more effective when organisations actively and concretely help militants to create their own affinity group, as was the case in the mobilisation for the Battle of Seattle. DAN, linked with the Ruckus Society, offered training workshops to hundreds of militants who were invited to form affinity groups. During the day of actions, these affinity groups were aided by others that had been formed in the buses converging on Seattle, such as that of the student association of the University of Victoria, British Columbia. In interviews, several participants

in affinity groups have indicated that they first heard of this method of organisation during workshops given by organisations that were not anarchist; on the other hand, others emphasised the anarchist origins of affinity groups. Nonetheless, the very presence of affinity groups at the heart of the movement for global justice evidences an anarchist influence, because the individuals working within an affinity group find themselves *de facto* involved in an anarchist political experience.

ANARCHY AND THE POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP

At first glance, ‘affinity’ and ‘anarchism’ do not appear to be synonyms. ‘Affinity’ is a ‘vague term’,²³ first used by chemists and alchemists – such as Albert le Grand (thirteenth century) – to describe a natural attraction between metals, substances and molecules. For sociologists such as Max Weber and then Michael Löwy, it explains the particular relationship between two doctrines as determined by the analogies between their rational structures, emotions or morals. The term ‘affinity’ currently signifies a shared interest in a kind of work, sport, music or a political cause. But to anarchists, it means much more. Their conceptualisation of the notion of affinity is first found in the writings of Charles Fourier, an anti-authoritarian socialist of the early nineteenth century, for whom ‘attraction’ (synonymous for him with ‘affinity’) would be the fundamental organizing principle around which a just society must be articulated.²⁴ Subsequently, the *Encyclopédie anarchiste* (1934) and the *Petit lexique philosophique de l’anarchisme* (2001)²⁵ stress the importance of the notion of affinity for anarchism. Sébastien Faure, for example, observes that the principle of affinity

is the most solid, because it is capable of resisting the conflicts, quarrels, and dislocations which are the fatal lot of organisations, parties and leagues that group together individuals with opposing tastes, with contradictory interests [...]; it is the best, or better put, the only one that conforms to the spirit of anarchism, since it does not stifle the aspirations, character, or liberty of the individual.²⁶

The affinity group would thus potentially be the basis for an anarchist organisation or society. As Faure affirmed, ‘the anarchist society that we want to found’ would be constituted by ‘an extraordinary flowering of affinity groups.’²⁷ A

member of the FAI during the 1930s described the formation of affinity groups in these vivid terms: 'After four or five words somebody can tell if there is an affinity, if there's trust. It's like love between a man and a woman – they meet and after only a few words, they know'.²⁸ The association between 'love' and 'affinity groups', as colourful as it is, nevertheless raises conceptual and political difficulties. The concept of friendship seems more accurately to express the outlook of participants in affinity groups, even if it 'is not certain that we can arrive at, or even approach, a definition of friendship'.²⁹ Unlike love, friendship does not generally evoke exclusivity or jealousy, but rather reciprocity and common interests; moreover, the activities shared by friends maintain and reinforce the bond of friendship. And friendship is not – in principle – determined by the gender or sex of individuals, or by their sexual preferences. Added to this are the sentiments of complicity, trust, and, yes, affinity, to which friendship is crucially linked, according to psychologists. What is more, love can be unidirectional, while affinity implies reciprocity of sentiment.³⁰ The anarchists interviewed for the purpose of this essay, as well as several texts that address the question of affinity groups, emphasise the importance of bonds of friendship as the connective element that reinforces the cohesion of groups.³¹

Friendship clearly influences the functioning of political organisations in general, but the dynamic of affinity groups is particularly influenced by the friendship amongst its members.³² In forming or in joining an affinity group, individuals become what can be called '*amilitants*' (in French). This new concept simultaneously evokes an amalgam of the role of the friend – *ami* in French – and of the militant, as well as a certain repudiation of traditional militancy, insofar as the prefix 'a' indicates negation. In this instance, the behaviour of political actors is primarily influenced by friendship instead of adherence to an ideological doctrine or organised patriotism, as is usually the case with traditional militancy. This politics of friendship favours the spread – whether conscious or not – of anarchist principles within the global movement for social justice. *Amilitants* feel that the centrality of the bonds of affinity and friendship within their group implies, almost naturally, a desire or will to reach consensus. An *amilitant* thus explains that his affinity group was composed of 'five people, friends' and that the decision-making process was 'spontaneously consensual' [GA1].³³ The importance of the friendship bond at the heart of affinity groups therefore facilitates an egalitarian

and consensual collective practice. This is consistent with the results of sociological studies on the subject of friendship, in the course of which respondents defined friendship as a relationship that is incompatible with authority and hierarchy.³⁴ Moreover, individuals who have participated in affinity groups claim that they functioned within an anarchist setting even if they did not identify themselves as anarchists or know anything about anarchism.³⁵ One militant, admitting that he let himself be manipulated in a way by his anarchist friends, explains that his 'group wasn't explicitly anarchist because it wanted to avoid sectarianism. Me, for example, I was more of a Marxist and I didn't want the anarchist label, but the functioning of the group was anarchist'. And he concludes, 'there are no affinity groups that are not anarchist in terms of their organisational mode' [GA2].

DEMOCRACY OR ANARCHISM?

Affinity groups offer a concrete model of anarchist experience that breaks not only with the logic of representative 'democracy' of a liberal regime, but also with that of various militant organisations having elected or co-opted leaders and elected representatives. Thus, the *modus operandi* of affinity groups is subversive in that it challenges the traditional decision-making processes of representative 'democracy' and the power held by representatives in the official political regime, political parties, or organisations within the social movement. The experience and functioning of affinity groups demonstrate that the 'people', or 'multitude', are endowed with the capacity to organise themselves to deliberate and act collectively in complex situations of mobilisation and mass action. Hence, the practice of affinity groups can nourish the historical debate between two attitudes that I have elsewhere designated under the rubrics of political 'agoraphobia' and 'agoraphilia'. Political agoraphobia is rooted in the certitude that the people are naturally devoid of political reason, so that, when assembled in the agora to deliberate, they inevitably fall prey to passions that are manipulated by demagogues and egotistical factions unconcerned with the 'common good'. Political agoraphobia in the modern era also presupposes that the sovereign body – the 'nation' – cannot physically gather together, given the constraints of demographics, geography, and the citizens' commitment to the private sphere (work, leisure, family, friends) in preference to the public sphere. Political agoraphilia, on the other hand, overturns all of

these arguments, emphasising that individuals in positions of power necessarily develop emotions and interests distinct from those of the 'people', precisely because of their place in a hierarchical structure. Accordingly, the elite is a faction unto itself, which does not hesitate to try to convince the people, through demagoguery, that it governs on behalf of the 'common good'. Despite the elite's attempt to limit the people's autonomy, the agoraphiles remind us that, historically, there have been many communities, including affinity groups, that have governed themselves directly and without leaders.³⁶ Small-scale political communities – such as squats, militant associations, gatherings of demonstrators, or affinity groups – are alternative political spaces where the decision-making process can be egalitarian and can manifest itself through deliberative assemblies in a hall, an amphitheatre, or even a street, which, when occupied by demonstrators, may serve as an agora. Through these very experiences, the people demonstrate that they have indeed the capacity to make rational decision and to give to themselves some deliberative procedures that may encourage the rationality of such a process. Moreover, such self-directed groups, able to act together in coalitions on an ad-hoc basis, call into question the logic of handing over centralised political power to representatives of a sovereign entity (the nation, the proletariat, civil society, etc.) endowed with a homogenous core and a common interest.³⁷

Would it be more accurate to speak of direct democracy or of anarchy when referring to affinity groups? Though academics and militants often confuse the two, anarchy is different from (direct) democracy: decisions are made collectively and by consensus under anarchy, but by majority vote in a democracy.³⁸ The narratives and testimonies on the subject of affinity groups show that their participants generally prefer anarchy to direct democracy, whether for moral reasons (democracy is considered synonymous with the tyranny of the majority) or political reasons (consensus is believed to foster group cohesion, the spontaneous division of tasks, and a feeling of security).³⁹

That said, the egalitarian and friendly nature of the political bond is not without its own tensions and problems. First, because 'from a circle of friends to the choice of a romantic partner, social relations are not simply guided by affinities, they arise from social determinants'.⁴⁰ In spite of the great tolerance displayed by anarchists, their friendships flourish more easily between militants sharing the same cultural, social and economic profile and who are more or less the same age.

Moreover, the statements of militants participating in affinity groups refer to the ‘danger of being too self-absorbed, because one is with people who think like oneself’ [GA5]. Furthermore, certain identities – socio-professional, gendered, etc. – can affect the informal power of each group. Men, for example, have a tendency to hold a premium of informal power over women and to consider women inferior in the political sphere with regard to the capacity for action and autonomy.⁴¹ In affinity groups, relations between men and women become that much more problematic when group members, especially men, have trouble apprehending the possibility of friendship between men and women, particularly if they view women primarily as sexual objects. However, such inequalities of informal power remain – in principle – less acute in anarchist groups than in hierarchical ones,⁴² since in the former there are no positions of official authority that would allow individuals to accumulate informal power and privileges or to wield coercive formal power. Diverse procedures have nevertheless been imagined and tried in order to reduce the inequalities of informal power and to facilitate deliberation, for example, the temporary nomination of a moderator, assisted or not by observers, and attentive to factors such as time, sexism, etc., and more generally to the need for egalitarian, free, and ‘efficient’⁴³ discussions.

In North America, where anarchists have been greatly influenced by the radical feminism of the preceding generation, meetings are often moderated in tandem by a man and a woman, and the floor is allotted to men and women in alternation. This is done to offset the proclivity of men to speak in public more easily, for longer periods of time, and in a more affirmative way.⁴⁴ Some militants think that, given the impact of patriarchal ideology both on society and the activist environment, it is also important for women to meet regularly in non-mixed affinity groups. Such groups allow women to free themselves from the power of men, to define their own issues and means of action, to ‘experience beautiful bonds of solidarity’ [F2], and to confront the ways in which occidental culture privileges friendship among men and distrusts friendship among women.⁴⁵ In France, however, anarchists are often more divided with regard to these types of practices, since they are seen as arising from a ‘communitarian’ spirit. Consequently, many French anarchists display a lack of interest in, or a difficulty in thinking through, concrete collective solutions that would reduce the inequalities between diverse ‘identities’ (men/women, etc.) within their own movement. In spite of these

important and concrete problems, the affinity group offers the possibility of enlarging direct participation and the autonomy of active individuals within a vast social movement. Furthermore, to the extent that several groups can decide to act in a coalition, this possibility need not be limited to the boundaries of any one affinity group.

Anarchism and rational crowds

Throughout their considerable history, affinity groups were employed in different ways in different political contexts. In nineteenth-century Spain, affinity groups were independent entities that operated continuously for extended lengths of time, some for several years. Certain affinity groups associated with the movement for global justice follow this model. But from the 1960s onward, militants have frequently resorted to affinity group methods to structure their actions during events such as large street demonstrations. In such cases, the affinity groups function within coalitions and their lifetimes are measured in hours or, at most, days.

By way of illustration, on the occasion of an official summit, activists of the movement for global justice may plan several days of parallel events and rallies. The ‘reformists’ – a term used here to cover a wide variety of groups, including NGOs, religious associations, unions, and left-wing parties – organise a large unity march, whose route is determined in consultation with political officials and the police. The march is declared ‘non-violent’ in advance, and a team of marshals supervises it. While participants in a ‘unitary’ march like this often come with a group of friends, they receive no encouragement to play any particular role in the demonstration. Affinity groups can join in (with their giant puppets, theatrical sketches, songs, slogans, leaflets, etc.), but the ‘efficiency’ of the demonstration does not depend on the initiative of its participants.

By contrast, more ‘radical’ groups will propose direct actions. The organisation of affinity groups allows each person to take responsibility for autonomous acts carried out within the framework of a collective action. Coalitions of affinity groups facilitate a voluntary division of militant work on three levels: over time, within the group, and among groups. This is consistent, moreover, with the striving for autonomy that anarchism endorses. For one thing, affinity groups let

militants take their time. As one anarchist [GA4] points out, 'I wasn't ready for some time to commit radical acts, and today there are still acts that I am not ready to commit. According to the practices of an affinity group, you can do what you want', and join the group whose type of action is in line with your personal inclinations at a given moment. The bond of friendship also permits a sharing and a division of labour amongst individuals who would find themselves excluded from groups based on a particular identity. For example, a heterosexual man explains that 'during a lesbian demonstration, I was in an affinity group but because I am a man I did not participate in the action on the ground. My task consisted of ensuring support for the group (transportation, telephone, help if they were arrested, etc)' [GA6].

In short, a horizontal coalition of affinity groups offers each group the possibility of carrying out a particular task. In the case of the Black Blocs, some groups will specialise in offensive actions, others in defensive actions, others still will act as voluntary nurses, scouts, musicians, flag bearers or banner carriers. Those who do not want to be in the street form groups that organise transportation and lodging, ensure legal defence, keep in touch with official or alternative media, run education workshops, and so forth. This does not imply that all people participating in 'radical' demonstrations are necessarily members of an affinity group. In fact, affinity groups still represent a minority practice, even within radical demonstrations.

In keeping with the principles of equality and autonomy, days of direct action are usually preceded by a general assembly where participants exchange information, pose questions, announce what their affinity group intends to do, and collectively take certain final decisions, even if the decisions concerning the place and hour of departure had been made by a militant core group weeks or months earlier. The decision-making processes of coalitions vary according to the circumstances. When the mobilisation is small, it is possible for everyone to participate in the general assembly. However, for very large-scale mobilisations, representatives of affinity groups ensure coordination through assemblies known in North America as 'spokescouncils', which have existed in the US anti-nuclear movement since the 1970s.⁴⁶ The term 'spokescouncil' brings to mind the dynamic link between the representatives who meet and the diverse groups that constitute the coalition. The delegates are not permanent and wield no coercive power that

could enable them to impose on their affinity groups decisions at odds with the will of the militants. The delegates can also be seconded by a 'runner', who shuttles between the delegate and his affinity group, making sure that the group's position is respected. It is worth noting here that the previously mentioned procedures to reduce the inequalities of informal power are most prominently applied during the spokescouncils.

The organisation of a coalition of affinity groups makes it possible for deliberation, both within and among affinity groups, to take place even in the midst of demonstrations, thereby transforming a crowd into a rational political actor endowed with a capacity for tactical thought. But decision-making through a spokescouncil requires a fair amount of time and often generates tensions between the demand for egalitarian and free political participation and the demand for tactical and strategic 'efficiency'.⁴⁷ A member of the Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Montreal stated in an interview that the anarchist decision-making process 'is long and laborious – especially the first time – but one must relearn, rid oneself of the emphasis on productivity, and realise that one can't resolve everything in two or three seconds' [C7].

Yet isn't it necessary to 'move quickly' in situations of direct action and physical confrontation with the police? The June 2003 demonstrations in Annemasse against the G8 Évian summit provide an example of how, even in complex circumstances, the spokescouncil method can achieve tactical efficiency while, at the same time, politically valorising the individuals taking part in the action. One demonstrator recalls:

I found it extraordinary that we could organise assemblies of delegates right in the midst of the blockage. There were barricades, fires had been lit, and the police were firing a large amount of tear gas. Nevertheless, an assembly was called as someone cried: 'meeting in ten minutes, near this street light'. The meeting was held no more than a few hundred metres from the police, and it allowed us to determine our next course of actions [...] Each person could inform the others of his needs: 'We need reinforcements in front of the police', 'we need help erecting the barricades', 'we should send people out on reconnaissance [...]', etc. [...]. We were therefore capable of acting in a dynamic way during the action, without a single person yelling 'we have to do this or that!'

She then comments on the new dynamic that arose between the demonstrators and the police:

The police think that you are a mob and that you are going to react like a mob. The affinity group model allows for the breaking of this dynamic: you no longer react like a mob, now you act like a rational thinker. Affinity groups help us to actualise our own power. The police are still surprised and disconcerted by the affinity groups: 'We have water cannons, tear gas', they say to themselves, 'but look at how these guys, who should run and save themselves, hold an assembly to decide what they are going to do!'

Such accounts call to mind sociologist Francesca Polletta's thesis that direct democracy, or consensus within social movements, has great political value because it facilitates (self-)organisation, innovation and cohesion amongst the militants themselves. Moreover, many people who have participated in an affinity group recognise its political effectiveness, both as a framework for egalitarian and free processes, and as a tactical boon, enhancing their manoeuvrability and power when facing the police. The modus operandi of affinity groups encourages people to act autonomously and with a sense of responsibility towards organisations, and demonstrates that the multitude is able to self-organise in an egalitarian manner, while at the same time acting efficiently. Finally, and most importantly, it allows direct deliberation amongst individuals who may then collectively define what is or is not politically 'efficient'.

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APPENDIX

FA1: Male, age 24. Active in anti-racist groups. Participated in the Village anticapitaliste alternatif anti-guerre (VAAAG) against the 2003 G8 in France. Member of the French Fédération Anarchiste (FA). Interviewed in Paris, December 11, 2003.

FA2: Male, age 53. Member of the FA since 1968. Interviewed in Paris, December 6, 2003.

FA3: Male, age 24. Member of the FA. Participated in the VAAAG. Interviewed in Lyon in 2004.

CNT1: Male, age 31. Member of the CNT of Vignolles. Interviewed in Paris, April 30, 2003.

GA1: Female, age 31. Lives in Montreal. Participated in two affinity groups, including the Pénultième état de conscience (PEC) in Ottawa, during the demonstrations against the 2002 G8. Interviewed in Montreal, August 2002.

GA2: Male, age 20. Participated in a number of affinity groups within several Black Blocs: against the G20 in Montreal (November 2000), against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec (April 2001), and at Porto Alegre, during the World Social Forum (2003). Interviewed in Montreal, October 2002.

GA4: Male, age 23. Lives in a Montreal suburb. Participated in several affinity groups, including distributing water to demonstrators opposing the G8 in Ottawa (June 2002), and Pain-Panet et Liberté (PPL), an action committee of the Convergences des luttes anti-capitalistes (CLAC) of Montreal, where he is responsible for food. Interviewed in Montreal, January 2003.

- GA5: Female, age 27. Lives in Montreal. Experience in various affinity groups. Took part in the blockage of the G Complex (Quebec City) in November 1997, demonstrations at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec in April 2001, Camp No Border at Strasbourg in 2002, etc. Interviewed in Montreal, January 2003.
- GA6: Male, age 30. Lives in New York State. Participated in fifteen affinity groups. Actions on behalf of animal rights, against capitalism, against war, for student rights. Interviewed in Paris, April 2003.
- GA7: Female, age 24. Lives in Boston. First affinity group in 2001: occupation of Harvard administrative offices for better working conditions for the janitors. Subsequent groups: demonstrations against the World Economic Forum in New York (Winter 2002), against the war in Iraq (Boston, 2003), against the G8 in France (June 2003). Interviewed in Paris, June 2003.
- GA9: Male, age 30 (approx.) Lives in Boston. Lived in Zagreb for two years. Participated in affinity groups in Boston and several anarchist actions linked to the global movement for social justice: Camp No Border (2002), demonstrations in Prague against NATO, and at Thessaloniki against the European Union (2003). Interviewed in Boston, November 2003.
- C7: Female, age 20. Lives in Montreal. Participated in 'agit-prop', 'popular education' and 'action' committees of the CLAC. Interviewed in Montreal, April 2002.
- V2: Male, age 23. Lives in a Parisian suburb. Interviewed in Strasbourg, June 21 2003.
- V9: Male, age 42. Lives in Amsterdam. Participated in the Autonomous Movement and numerous actions in Europe since the 1980s. Interviewed in Montreal, November 26, 2003.
- V10: Male, age 24. Participated in the anti-fascist movement in France in the late 1990s, in the VAAAG, in demonstrations against the European Union (Lyon, 2000) and against the G8 in Genoa (July 2001). Interviewed in Paris, December 11, 2003.
- V11: Male, age 37. Lives in Paris. FA militant and participant in the VAAAG. Interviewed via e-mail, January 2004.
- F2: Female, age 28. Member of CLAC. Interviewed in Montreal, March 19, 2003.
- F4: Male, age 24. Lives in Montreal. Member of Hommes contre le patriarcat. Interviewed via telephone Boston-Montreal, April 10, 2004.

F5: Female, age 24. Lives in Montreal. Member of the feminist affinity group Némésis. Interviewed via telephone Boston-Montreal, April 10, 2004.

NOTES

1. F. Dupuis-Déri (ed.), *Les Black Blocs: la liberté et l'égalité se manifestent* (Montreal, Lux, 2007) ; F. Dupuis-Déri, 'The Black Blocs: 10 years after Seattle, still rockin': Anarchism, direct action, and deliberative practices', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, forthcoming (2010).
2. Patrick F. Gillham & Gary T. Marx, 'Complexity & Irony in Policing and Protesting: The World Trade Organization in Seattle', *Social Justice* (2000), 27: 2, pp. 212-236.
3. Graeme Chesters, 'Shape shifting: Civil society, complexity and social movements', *Anarchist Studies*, 11: 1 (2003), pp. 42-65; David Graeber, 'The new anarchists', Tom Mertes (ed.), *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 202-218.
4. Dorothy Kidd, 'Indymedia.org: A new communications commons', Martha McCaughey & Michael D. Ayers (eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (New York-London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 47-70.
5. Allan Antliff, 'Anarchy in art: Strategies of dissidence', *Anarchist Studies*, 11: 1 (2003), pp. 66-83.
6. Michael Hardt, 'Today's Bandung ?', T. Mertes (ed.), *A Movement of Movements*, p. 230-236.
7. Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868-1936* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), p. 196; Daniel Colson, *Petit lexique philosophique de l'anarchisme de Proudhon à Deleuze* (Paris, Librairie générale française, 2001), p. 21; George R. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 131-133.
8. Cited in Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* (Hastings-Petersham North: Meltzer Press-Jura Media, 2000), p. 28 (see also pp. 11, 30).
9. Eduardo Colombo, 'Anarchism in Argentina and Uruguay', Apter & Joll (eds.), *Anarchism Today*, p. 186. The author does not state whether the term 'affinity' has historical origins or is his own creation.
10. Émile Armand, *Milieux de vie en commun et colonies* (éd. L'En Dehors, 1931) (extract, source: <http://bibliolib.net/>).
11. Discussion in Boston, April 2004.

12. Caroline Estes, 'Consensus', Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), *Reinventing Anarchy, Again* (San Francisco: AKPress, 1996), p. 368-374.
13. Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Wildwood House, 1974 [1971]), pp. 19-20.
14. Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Noël Aurora Sturgeon, *Direct Theory and Political Action: The Political Theory of the U.S. Nonviolent Direct Action Movement* (Santa Cruz, Doctoral Thesis, History of Consciousness Department, University of California, 1991); Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is An Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002).
15. For details of the anonymous interviewees, please see the appendix at the end of this article.
16. George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (New Jersey, Humanities Press International Inc., 1997); George Katsiaficas, 'The necessity of Autonomy', *New Political Science*, 23: 4 (2001), pp. 547-553.
17. Militants also appropriate the logos of companies that they detest, or use them to their own ends on the Internet, a system created by the American Army.
18. <http://alum.mit.edu/ccg/affinity/>.
19. <http://www.aacsb.edu/members/communities/affinitygroups/policies.asp>;
<http://www.aacsb.edu/members/communities/affinitygroups/about.asp>.
20. http://www.careers.state.gov/div_affinity.html.
21. <http://www.controg8.org/adn/fran/main.htm>.
22. See the section 'Qui sommes-nous?', of the pamphlet *Résiste!*, Montreal, CLAC, March 2001, p. 2.
23. André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 31.
24. According to his theory, sexual passions constitute the most sound social links. Charles Fourier, *Vers la liberté en amour* (selection of texts by Daniel Guérin, Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 184. Fourier's influence would explain the connotation of 'libertarian' which is often used to express 'affinity' in social psychology discourse: Jean Maisonneuve & Lubomir Lamy, 'Les relations électives', Serge Moscovici (ed.), *Psychologie sociale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 167.
25. D. Colson, *Petit lexique philosophique de l'anarchisme...*, p. 20.
26. Sébastien Faure in *Encyclopédie anarchiste*, I (Paris: éd. La Librairie Internationale, 1934), p. 25.
27. *Encyclopédie anarchiste*, vol. I, p. 26 et p. 48.

28. As cited by J.R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 140.
29. Dimitri El Murr, *L'Amitié* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 2001), p. 11.
30. J. Maisonneuve & L. Lamy, *Psychologie de l'amitié* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993).
31. See the text 'Affinity groups', from the American essayist and militant, Starhawk (<http://www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html>) and the web site of the organization Direct Democracy Now! (<http://www.directdemocracynow.org>).
32. The ideologues and the elites of social movements propose distinct organisational models for the organisation of primary groups according to their specific orientations: the Marxist-Leninist organise cells, the fascists 'fascia' or 'squadrons', the unions 'sections' or 'locals' and political parties form 'local committees'. Friendship is important to them, but other bonds play an important determining role: the socio-professional profile for Marxist-Leninist cells, union committees and student executives; gender for female collectives, whether they are feminist or not; sexual preferences for homosexual groups.
33. Another militant explains: 'because I was with people whom I'd known for a long time, friends,' *'it goes without saying* that the organisation would be horizontal, without a leader'. 'We voted sometimes, but we abandoned this practice because if someone is more or less ready to act, and if they feel forced to do it by a vote, it creates ill feelings' [GA4]. See also: John Forester, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes* (Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 2000), p. 197.
34. Alain Degenne & Michel Forsé, 'Comment on trouve ses amis', Philippe Cabin (ed.), *La Communication: État des savoirs* (Paris: éd. Sciences sociales, 2003), p. 188. See also Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary democracy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), pp. 9, 28-29
35. One militant had also heard about 'affinity groups' via feminism, before finding out about anarchism: 'In my feminist affinity group, we read about anarchism and we said to ourselves "What? We're anarchists!"' [F5]. See also: Amory Starr, *Naming the Enemy: Anti-Corporate Movements Confront Globalization* (New York-Australia: Zed Books-Pluto Press, 2000), p. 115.
36. See David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004). See also: R.K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Pierre Clastre, *La société contre l'État* (Paris: Minuit, 1974) ; Marcel Detienne (ed.), *Qui veut la parole* (Paris: Seuil, 2003); Pierre Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (1902). On the subject of European communes, see Henry Babeau, *Les assemblées générales des communautés d'habitants en France du XIIIe*

- siècle à la Révolution* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Law of Paris, 1893).
37. Authors close to the movement for global justice, such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno, especially privilege the concept of the 'multitude', which evokes the heterogeneity of the social body.
 38. It's a matter of conceptual distinction. In practice, an individual can favour direct democracy and call him or herself an anarchist, as do members of the NEFAC and M. Bookchin. By the same token, an individual can privilege consensus without calling him or herself an 'anarchist'.
 39. M. Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, p. 244. Experts on security matters in the United States note that the methods of affinity groups make social movements more difficult to infiltrate, to spy upon and to manipulate (Paul de Armond, 'Netwar in the Emerald City: WTO Protest Strategy and Tactics', *Networks and Netwars: Crimes, Terrorism, Militancy* (Santa Monica, Rand, 2001), p. 203).
 40. Alain Degenne & Michel Forsé, 'Comment on trouve ses amis', p. 187. See also by the same authors Chapter 2 in *Les réseaux sociaux* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994) et Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 268; Jean Maisonneuve & Lubomir Lamy, 'Les relations électives', Moscovici (ed.), *Psychologie sociale* and the more philosophical commentaries of the chapter 'De l'aristocratie ou les affinités électives', Michel Onfray, *La sculpture de soi: La morale esthétique* (Paris: Grasset, 1998).
 41. Studies on the topic abound. See Virginia Valian, *Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women* (Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1999).
 42. An anarchist who participated in the Village anticapitaliste alternatif anti-guerre (VAAAG) remarks that 'it is difficult for everyone to liberate themselves from our socialisation, and there are little leaders that tend to emerge' even in anarchist inspired organisations [V2]. See also Philippe Coutant, 'L'autorité dans les groupes militants, les groupes libertaires?', *Les Temps maudits*, 12 (2001); and Jo Freeman, 'The tyranny of structurelessness', Dark Star (ed.), *Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* (San Francisco: AK Press, 2002), p. 54-62.
 43. Per Herngren, *Path of Resistance: The Practice of Civil Disobedience* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993), pp. 154-157, 167-168.
 44. Nina Eliasoph, 'Politeness, power, and women's language', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1987), p. 79-103.; Margaret Kohn, 'Language, Power, and Persuasion: Toward a Critique of Deliberative Democracy', *Constellations*, 7: 3 (2000), pp. 408-429; Iris Marion Young, 'Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy', Seyla Benhabib (ed), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the*

- Political* (Princeton [NJ]: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 120-135.
45. Éline Audet, *Le Cœur pensant: Courtepointe de l'amitié entre Females* (Québec: Le Loup de Gouttière, 2000). Nina Eliasoph especially remarks how the practices of affinity groups facilitate a more egalitarian access to speech between males and females (in 'Politeness, power, and women's language', p. 98).
46. B. Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*, pp. 3, 65, 130.
47. See the critique of the practices of spokescouncils by a demonstrator against the FMI and the BM in Prague during September 2000, as cited by Tim Jordan, *Activism!*, London, Reaktion Books, 2002.

Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy

Laurence Davis

ABSTRACT

A leading theorist of the anarchist and revolutionary personalist dimensions of the counterculture of the 1960s, some twenty-five years later Murray Bookchin adopted a much more strident and combative stance towards countercultural, lifestyle-oriented anarchism in his 1995 polemic, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*. This essay examines the rationale for Bookchin's shift from reasoned dialogue with participants in the Euro-American counterculture to polemical confrontation. In contrast to those who have charged Bookchin with theoretical inconsistency driven by cynical political opportunism, it argues that while his political thought evolved over time in response to changing historical circumstances, the later position is theoretically consistent with the earlier. However, it also maintains that Bookchin's straw man account of lifestyle anarchism in the 1990s is misguided and politically unhelpful insofar as it obscures what the earlier work helped so well to clarify: namely, the integral connections between the personal and the political aspects of libertarian revolutionary social change. It thus obscures one of the most creative and hopeful aspects of the anarchist currents in the newest social movements that emerged from the rebellions of 1968.

Keywords *Bookchin, lifestyle anarchism, countercultures, revolution*

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy and practice of revolutionary personalism emerged from the most radical, politicised edge of the counterculture of the 1960s, as well as from anar-

chist-inclined strains of pacifism, anti-racism, radical feminism and ecologism. Its defining characteristic is the recognition that the liberation of everyday life is an essential component of anti-authoritarian revolutionary change. The influential anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin articulated this point with memorable clarity in the immediate aftermath of the events of May-June 1968 in France, 'It is plain that the goal of revolutionary today must be the liberation of daily life. Any revolution that fails to achieve this goal is counter-revolution. Above all, it is *we* who have to be liberated, *our* daily lives, with all their moments, hours and days, and not universals like "History" and "Society"' (Bookchin, 2004 [1971], p. 10).

Some twenty-five years later, however, Bookchin characterised the personalist legacy of the Euro-American counterculture in much less sympathetic terms. In a brief but hugely controversial book published in 1995, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*, he lambasted contemporary anarchists for abandoning their social revolutionary and utopian aspirations in favour of an introspective personalism, escapist aestheticism, and chic boutique lifestyle subculture that posed no serious threat to the existing powers. In this essay I examine the rationale for this polemical criticism. Is it simply a case of what at least one critic (Black, 1997, ch. 1) has somewhat unkindly termed 'grumpy old man' syndrome, or are there deeper issues at stake that merit closer consideration?

The plan for the paper is as follows. First, I will trace the history of the anarchist counterculture in the U.S. context in which Bookchin's thinking developed, focusing particularly on the 1960s and its anarchist revolutionary personalist legacies. Second, I will elucidate Bookchin's sympathetic theorisation of the revolutionary personalism of the 1960s in influential works published shortly after the events of 1968. Third, I will sketch his apparently contrasting critique of lifestyle anarchism in his 1995 polemic. Finally, I conclude with an assessment of the significance and merits of Bookchin's arguments based on my interpretation of the development of anarchist practice and theory since the 1960s.

My argument is that while Bookchin's differing accounts of lifestyle-oriented cultural politics in the immediate aftermath of 1968 and in the mid-1990s are indeed theoretically consistent, the later work is misguided and politically unhelpful insofar as its polemical intent and either/or theoretical premises obscure what the earlier work helped so well to clarify: namely, the integral connections between the personal and the political aspects of libertarian revolutionary social

change. It thus obscures one of the most significant legacies of the anarchist revolutionary activity of 1968.

ANARCHISM AND THE AMERICAN COUNTERCULTURE

The core of anarchism is the belief that society can and should be organised without coercive authority. While anarchist ideas may be traced back thousands of years to the Taoists in ancient China, anarchism first emerged as a coherent political ideology in the late eighteenth century. It developed primarily in opposition to centralised states and industrial capitalism, and by the end of the nineteenth century was a mass revolutionary movement attracting millions of adherents worldwide.

Opposed to all forms of domination, whether in the home or the workplace or the political arena, anarchists have articulated broad cultural critiques of modern society and envisioned revolutionary alternatives embodying values very different from those that predominate in contemporary archist societies. Not content simply to theorise or strategise revolutionary alternatives, anarchists have also embodied the revolution in their daily lives, thus spawning an enormously creative counterculture consisting of (amongst other things) free art, free schools, free media and free love. In the United States, this anarchist counterculture reached its most developed form in two periods: from the end of the nineteenth century through the first two decades of the twentieth, and again in the 1960s.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, war, economic collapse, restrictions on immigration and political repression took their toll on the American anarchist movement. Nevertheless, libertarian book clubs, poetry circles, and anarchist periodicals served as a bridge between the vibrant anarchist countercultures of the early twentieth century and the 1960s. Of particular note during this period was the group of poets and painters that joined Kenneth Rexroth's Libertarian Circle in post-war San Francisco. A pacifist and an anarchist, Rexroth believed in a model of human development that led from personal freedom to an ethics of universal compassion by way of love. The primary forces impeding such development, he believed, were the state and capitalism, which conspired to quantify and commodify all human relationships, and so destroy the integrity of the personality. The Libertarian Circle was founded in 1946 in order to counter such cultural depersonalisation, and while it survived for only a few years its impact on the subsequent development of the

American counterculture was of lasting significance. Among those heavily influenced by its ethos were the founders of the Beat movement.

One of the most distinctive features of both the Libertarian Circle and the Beat movement was their commitment to a form of countercultural 'personalist' politics inspired in large measure by the pacifist anarchist tradition. In practice, this revolutionary personalism entailed a rejection of traditional radical political strategies involving engagement with the structures of power in favour of more personal attempts to 'live the revolution now' – in part by establishing alternative cultural institutions that ran parallel to the old world but had as little to do with it as possible. What is now commonly referred to as the sixties counterculture grew out of these experiments, as increasing numbers of Americans decided to 'drop out' of the cultural mainstream. Young people in particular turned their backs on cultural expectations of marriage, career and materialistic social climbing, and turned instead to a Beat lifestyle of voluntary poverty, sexual freedom, heightened consciousness, personal expression and communion with nature. Some rejected social commitment altogether. Others embraced a form of social commitment based on values very different from those that predominated in mainstream American society. Between 1965 and 1967, for instance, American youth flocked to the low-rent Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco and developed a communitarian subculture distinguished by residential collectives, shops run not only for profit but for the community, street festivals, and the pooling of money, food and drugs. Much of this activity was anarchist in orientation. For example, the members of a group named 'The Diggers' in honour of the radical agrarian communards of seventeenth-century England attempted to create a moneyless economy by recycling society's surplus goods. They also practised a form of anarchic street theatre intended to satirise the alienating and exploitative institutions of mainstream American culture.

In certain respects the American counterculture of the 1960s closely resembled its early twentieth-century anarchist counterpart, even if many of its practitioners were unaware of this fact. The resemblance is particularly striking after 1967, when the counterculture grew by leaps and bounds and millions of Americans chose to live in thousands of communes based on alternative norms and values. Between 1965 and 1970, participants in the counterculture created at least twice as many rural communes as had been established in all of American history (Farrell, 1997, p. 225). In spite of their great diversity, all of the communes aimed to achieve ecological and

direct, face-to-face forms of human association reminiscent of the craft utopian visions articulated by anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and sympathetic libertarian socialists such as William Morris at the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1960s, a similar vision of decentralised, self-governing organic community and pleasurable work was articulated by the anarcho-communist Paul Goodman, whose ideas exercised a profound influence on the American counterculture. Later, as the sixties counterculture began to wane the ideas of both Goodman and Kropotkin inspired the literary imagination of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose 1974 anarchist utopian novel *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* stands as a lasting monument to the spirit of the American anarchist counterculture.

The countercultural politics of the 1960s has been described aptly as ‘the politics of anarchism’ (Farrell, 1997, p. 229). Similarly, the larger ‘Movement’ of which the sixties counterculture was such an integral part has been characterised appropriately as ‘anarchist in its deepest impulses’ (M. Goodman, 1970, p. viii). One of the many features that made it so was the distinctive way in which it linked the personal and the political. According to Nigel Young, the tradition of anarchism and libertarian or utopian socialism was the ‘only’ political tradition which over the previous century had clearly expressed such an indivisible integration of personal revolt against oppression with the political strategy of dismantling coercive structures (N. Young, 1977, p. 134). While this claim is doubtless exaggerated – certain not explicitly or exclusively anarchist or libertarian socialist forms of feminism, pacifism, ecologism and anti-imperialism all articulated comparable revolutionary linkages between the personal and the political – it does highlight usefully one of the enduringly compelling features of the anarchist tradition. Hence an important part of its appeal to those in the movement who sought to articulate and enact a new concept of revolution opposed to domination in all aspects of life, from the ‘pyramid of power’ in universities, workplaces and the state to hierarchical relationships in intimate life.

BOOKCHIN AND THE EVENTS OF 1968

Reflecting on these developments in the immediate aftermath of the events of 1968, Murray Bookchin – then in his late forties – had little doubt about their revolutionary implications. In a short piece published in 1970, for example, he suggested

that the hippy-inspired radical collectives were 'perhaps the focal centres of revolutionary energy in the present period' and claimed that Youth Culture as a whole prefigured, however inchoately, 'a joyous communist and classless society, freed of the trammels of hierarchy and domination, a society that would transcend the historic splits between town and country, individual and society, and mind and body' (Bookchin, 1970, pp. 59-60). In a similar vein, in his classic collection of essays *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) he lauded the counterculture of his day as a form of utopian prefigurative politics. In the very act of refusing to live by bourgeois strictures, he suggested, those who dropped out of mainstream society were planting the seeds of a new way of life. Negation thus passed into affirmation, as the rejection of the present became the assertion of a qualitatively different future within the 'rotting guts' of capitalism itself (Bookchin, 2004 [1971], p. viii). And dropping out became a mode of dropping in to the experimental yet still highly ambiguous social relations of a potentially revolutionary utopian space.

From Bookchin's perspective, such rebelliousness did not in and of itself constitute revolutionary action. Revolutionary action, he maintained, in a manner consistent with more strident and contentious remarks in the 1990s, entailed at least in part an organised form of politics that the counterculture alone did not and could not provide. Understood as a means to an end, however, it played an indispensable part in the revolutionary process in at least two respects.

First, at a social level, it played a decisive 'preparatory' role in creating an atmosphere of indiscipline, spontaneity, radicalism and freedom in which revolutionary changes could take place. In this regard, Bookchin suggests, it closely resembled the revolutionary Enlightenment that swept through France in the eighteenth century – a period that transformed French consciousness and opened the way for the Great Revolution of 1789. In both cases, 'the old institutions were slowly pulverized by molecular action from below long before they were toppled by mass revolutionary action' (Bookchin, 2004, p. 14). In the 1960s it was the Beat movement that created the most significant breach in the solidly middle-class values of the 1950s, a breach that was widened enormously by the illegal activities of pacifists, civil-rights workers, draft resisters and hippies. Moreover, the 'merely reactive' response of rebellious American youth produced indispensable forms of libertarian and utopian affirmation such as the right to make love without restriction, the goal of community, the disavowal of money and commodities, the belief in mutual aid, and a new respect for spontaneity.

Second, at a more personal level, the counterculture of the 1960s encouraged a libertarian lifestyle that provided the revolutionary with the psychic resources necessary to resist the subversion of the revolutionary project by authoritarian or elitist propensities assimilated in hierarchical society. As Bookchin observed in a piece originally composed in Paris in July 1968, the habits of authority and hierarchy are instilled in the individual at the very outset of life – in the family milieu of infancy, in childhood education at home and in school, and in the organisation of work, ‘leisure’ and everyday life (Bookchin, 2004, p. 168). If it is to avoid becoming a source of counterrevolution, the revolutionary movement must therefore be ‘profoundly concerned with lifestyle’ (Bookchin, 2004, p. 11). And the revolutionary must try to reflect in his or her own person the conditions of the society (s)he is trying to achieve – at least to the degree this is possible in the constraining circumstances of the here and now. Anarchist organisations, Bookchin observed elsewhere (in response to charges by Marcuse and Huey Newton that anarchists rejected revolutionary organisation in favour of individual expression), differed from socialist political parties by virtue of being social movements combining ‘a creative revolutionary life-style with a creative revolutionary theory’ (Bookchin, January 1969). Both were essential, insofar as ‘life-style is related as intimately to revolution as revolution is to life-style’ (Bookchin, May 1969).

Indeed, Bookchin contends, it was precisely the absence of such lifestyle-inspired and embodied creativity on the part of certain orthodox Marxist revolutionaries that proved so damaging to revolutionary prospects during the Paris revolt of May-June 1968. Among the most serious obstacles to the May-June uprising in Paris were not only de Gaulle and the police, but also the hardened organisations of the left – among them the Communist Party that stifled initiatives in many factories and the Leninist and Trotskyist groups that attempted to manipulate events so as to serve their own political interests. Members of tightly disciplined, hierarchical organisations, they saw it as their task to ‘discipline’ the revolt, or in Bookchin’s words ‘to de-revolutionize it by imbuing it with the habits of obedience and authority that their organizations have assimilated from the established order’ (Bookchin, 2004, p. 170). These habits manifested themselves in the forms of parliamentary manoeuvring, street caucusing, and attempts to control the revolutionary expressions of freedom created by the rebellion. By contrast, anarchic and anarchist and Situationist groups worked not for the ‘seizure of

power' but for its dissolution and they embodied this aim both in their non-hierarchical and participatory forms of revolutionary organisation and in the lifestyles of their members.

Bookchin elaborated on these arguments in an important article, entitled 'On Spontaneity and Organisation', that developed from a talk he read at the Telos Conference on Organisation in Buffalo, New York in November 1971. In this piece he notes how ironic it is that 'the socialist movement' of his day (he does not specify which aspects of the movement he is referring to), far from being in the 'vanguard' of social and cultural developments, lingered behind them in almost every respect – in particular, in its 'shallow' comprehension of the counterculture, its 'anaemic' interpretation of women's liberation, its 'indifference' to ecology, and its 'ignorance' even of new currents drifting through the factories. While socialist ideologues engaged in 'simplistic' class analysis and adopted strategies and tactics 'already inadequate a generation ago', millions of people from all walks of life were intuitively trying to eliminate not merely material exploitation but domination in *all* its forms. Hence the 'intensely *personal*' nature of the revolution spreading through society (Bookchin, 1975, p. 1), and its concern with the seemingly mundane details of everyday life. Hence also the 'enormous advance' (Bookchin, 1975, p. 2) scored by the countercultural movement over its socialist counterpart: namely, the development of a revolutionary personalism that sees in impersonal goals the perpetuation of domination in its most insidious unconscious forms.

In contrast to those socialists who dismissed such developments out of hand as a form of 'bourgeois individualism', the Murray Bookchin of the early 1970s drew a distinction between the atomised egotism produced by capitalism and the libertarian communist struggle for a free and joyous society in which each individual might acquire control over her or his everyday life. Viewed as an element of the latter project – he suggests, in a line of reasoning that takes him beyond the means/end dichotomies of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* – the process of anti-authoritarian *individuation* initiated by the counterculture was *itself* revolutionary insofar as revolution may be understood as self-activity in its most advanced form: the individuation of the 'masses' into conscious beings who can take direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives. It follows logically – even if Bookchin himself does not explicitly make the point because of his perfectionist conception of utopia and strictly time-bound understanding of revolution – that an anarchist revolution may be

understood as an open-ended process unfolding over time rather than a watershed event dividing the domination-ridden pre-revolutionary world from the domination-free utopia of the post-revolutionary future. Moreover, as he does explicitly recognise, this process would necessarily be an organic rather a mechanical one. As such, it would affirm 'not only the rational but the joyous, the sensuous and the aesthetic side of revolution' (Bookchin, 1975, p. 8). More specifically, it would affirm and extend the counterculture's practical and wide-ranging challenges to both the unconscious and conscious legacies of domination: for example, its commitments to the autonomy of self and the right to self-realisation; the evocation of love, sensuality, and the unfettered expression of the body; the spontaneous expression of feeling; the de-alienation of relations between people; the formation of communities and communes; the free access of all to the means of life; the rejection of the plastic commodity world and its careers; the practice of mutual aid; the acquisition of skills and counter-technologies; a new reverence for life and for the balance of nature; and the replacement of the work ethic by meaningful work and the claims of pleasure.

BOOKCHIN'S CRITIQUE OF LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM IN 1995

A leading theorist of the anarchist and revolutionary personalist dimensions of the counterculture of the 1960s, some twenty-five years later Bookchin adopts a much more strident and combative tone towards countercultural, lifestyle-oriented anarchism in his 1995 polemic, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*. The targets of his polemic – ranging from the individualist anarchism of the philosopher L. Susan Brown to the mystical writings of Hakim Bey to the primitivism of George Bradford and John Zerzan – are idiosyncratic and diverse, and it is not immediately clear why he chooses to focus on the writings of these particular individuals rather than the practice-oriented anarchist movement that none of them claim to represent. However, from Bookchin's point of view nuanced questions about authorial intent are evidently beside the point, insofar as he believes that the relatively small sample of written work that is the object of his critique is representative of a much wider, and to him enormously disturbing, trend in the post-1960s Euro-American anarchist movement. Specifically, he contends – albeit without supporting empirical evidence – that these writings both reflect and

provide the intellectual premises for a momentous shift in the movement away from social revolutionary and utopian aspirations towards a narcissistic sub-cultural lifestyle that poses no serious threat to the powers that be.

Whereas in the late 1960s and early 1970s Bookchin welcomed the individualism, spontaneity, cultural and sexual freedom, and undisciplined libertarian lifestyle that he associated with the counterculture, in the 1990s he lambastes contemporary anarchists for exhibiting precisely these same qualities. Moreover, he places the blame for this alleged degeneration of Euro-American anarchism on those selfsame participants in the counterculture of the late 1960s whom he earlier praised for their utopian and revolutionary cultural experimentation. Looking backwards on the 1960s from a disillusioned perspective in the 1990s, he identifies two anarchic countercultures in the earlier period, one eminently social and hence good and the other personalistic and hence bad:

For all its shortcomings, the anarchic counterculture during the early part of the hectic 1960s was often intensely political and cast expressions like desire and ecstasy in eminently social terms, often deriding the personalistic tendencies of the later Woodstock generation. The transformation of the 'youth culture,' as it was originally called, from the birth of the civil rights and peace movements to Woodstock and Altamont, with its emphasis on a purely self-indulgent form of 'pleasure,' is reflected in Dylan's devolution from 'Blowin' in the Wind' to 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' (Bookchin, 1995, p. 9).

According to the elder Bookchin, individualist and collectivist forms of anarchism cannot coexist. One or the other must triumph, and he leaves no doubt about which side of the struggle he is on:

In the traditionally individualist-liberal United States and Britain, the 1990s are awash in self-styled anarchists who – their flamboyant radical rhetoric aside – are cultivating a latter-day anarcho-individualism that I will call *lifestyle anarchism* ... Ad hoc adventurism, personal bravura, an aversion to theory oddly akin to the anti-rational biases of postmodernism, celebrations of theoretical incoherence (pluralism), a basically apolitical and anti-organizational commitment to imagination, desire, and ecstasy, and an intensely self-oriented enchantment of everyday

life, reflect the toll that social reaction has taken on Euro-American anarchism over the past two decades (Ibid., pp. 8-9).

As these comments make abundantly clear, Bookchin objects in particular to what he takes to be the egotistical, anti-social personalism of so many contemporary anarchists. The danger of such 'turning inward', he suggests, is that it culminates in a personalistic commitment to individual autonomy rather than a collectivist commitment to social freedom. And in so doing, it gives rise not to revolution but to reaction:

lifestyle anarchism today is finding its principal expression in spray-can graffiti, postmodernist nihilism, antirationalism, neoprimitivism, anti-technologism, neo-Situationist 'cultural terrorism', mysticism, and a 'practice' of staging Foucauldian 'personal insurrections' ... More oriented toward achieving one's own 'self-realization' than achieving basic social change, this trend among lifestyle anarchists is particularly noxious in that its 'turning inward' ... claims to be a politics (Ibid., pp. 19-20).

Against this ostensible trend in contemporary anarchism, Bookchin advocates a renewal of what he refers to as the 'social anarchist' tradition. Heir to the Enlightenment tradition with due regard to its limitations, he suggests, the social anarchist tradition celebrates the thinking human mind without denying passion, imagination, play, and art. Yet rather than reify these qualities into hazy fixed categories, as apparently lifestyle anarchists are guilty of doing, it strives to incorporate them into everyday life by means of a radically democratic transformation of the public sphere. An unapologetically revolutionary body of ideas and practice, it is, according to Bookchin, minimally committed to four central tenets: a confederation of decentralised municipalities; an unwavering opposition to statism; a belief in direct democracy; and a vision of a libertarian communist society. It is thus ineluctably a *programmatic* as well as activist social movement that joins a libertarian communist vision with a vigorous critique of capitalism.

In a brief but important companion piece published in the same 1995 AK Press edition of *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*, Bookchin elaborates on this point by holding up as a model for emulation a set of ideas and practices that he

refers to as 'The Left That Was'. By this term he means not the Leninist 'Old Left' or the Maoist 'New Left', but 'an idealistic, often theoretically coherent Left that militantly emphasized its internationalism, its rationality in the treatment of reality, its democratic spirit, and its vigorous revolutionary aspirations' (Ibid., p. 66). Whatever its faults, Bookchin contends, this genuine Left was characterised by a rich generosity of spirit, a commitment to a humane world, a rare degree of political independence, a vibrant revolutionary spirit, and an unwavering opposition to capitalism. Illustrative examples include individual revolutionaries such as William Morris, Gustav Landauer, Karl Marx, Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin, and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as revolutionary social movements like Spanish anarchism in the 1930s. In stark contrast, some sixty years later the Left had shrivelled to a shadow of its former self, its dissident language co-opted by those who if they have their way will transform it into a socially innocuous, narcissistic form of lifestyle-oriented posturing.

Indeed, Bookchin would claim seven years later in an online piece entitled 'The Communalist Project' that this was precisely the fate of the anarchist-dominated contemporary Left. Moreover, whereas in 1995 he still believed that anarchism itself might be rescued from the designs of the lifestyle anarchists, in 2002 he declared that 'anarchism ... represents in its *authentic* form a highly individualistic outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action' (Bookchin, 2002). Hence the need for an international Left to 'advance courageously' beyond anarchism altogether – and in fact beyond Marxism, syndicalism, and 'vague socialist framework[s]' as well – toward Bookchin's own longstanding libertarian municipalist project, now dubbed simply Communalism.

ASSESSING THE ARGUMENTS

How might one account for these differing treatments of the cultural and political legacies of the 1960s, and 1968 in particular? One recent critic of Bookchin has contended that he completely reversed himself in his later work, and that he did so because of a combination of 'grumpy old man' syndrome and a cynical and opportunistic desire to demolish all possible alternatives to his own onetime creed of social anarchism (Black, 1997). Against this view, I will argue that in spite of a clear shift in emphasis the later work is theoretically consistent with

the earlier. However, I will also maintain that the newer and far more confrontational position Bookchin stakes out is misguided and politically unhelpful insofar as it obscures what his earlier work helped to clarify: namely, the integral connections between the personal and the political aspects of libertarian revolutionary social change.

That Bookchin's views on the ever evolving Euro-American counterculture changed over a twenty to twenty-five year period is clear. In particular, he grew much more critical of the part-anarchist-inspired personalist legacy of the late 1960s that he had earlier done so much to elucidate. Provoked by what he regarded as a destructive turning inward on the Left, Bookchin re-evaluated his earlier, generally sympathetic and co-operative engagement with countercultural personalism and developed a new theoretical position grounded in a dichotomous and politically polarising distinction between social anarchism and lifestyle anarchism. In the new account, he foregrounds the reservations about lifestyle-oriented cultural politics that he had earlier muted or expressed only infrequently in order to attempt to build bridges between the countercultural and political wings of the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s. He does so, moreover, in a markedly strident and polemical tone apt to foreclose precisely the sort of reasoned dialogue that his earlier work initiated. If in the 1960s he 'made the need for a convergence between the counterculture and the New Left the focus of most of [his] activities' (Bookchin, 1998), in the changed circumstances of the 1990s he put his earlier bridge-building efforts behind him and turned instead to what he perceived as the then far more urgent political task of extinguishing once and for all the mortal threat to the revolutionary anarchist tradition posed by individualistic, liberal or lifestyle anarchists.

What is less clear is that there is any continuity of principle at all between the earlier work and the later. I suggest, however, that at both periods in his life Bookchin quite consistently advocated a variety of *revolutionary* personalism inspired by the libertarian communist tradition. In the 1960s and early 1970s, he was influenced by the simultaneously individualist and collectivist example of the counterculture and saw it as a vehicle – in *tandem* with more overtly political forms of revolutionary anarchism – for realising libertarian communist aims. In contrast, by the 1990s he had witnessed the eclipse of the revolutionary political movements that both sustained and were in turn sustained by the radical dynamic

of the counterculture. What remained, from his perspective, consisted of little more than a rag-tag assortment of atomised lifestyles, the residual by-product of a process of cultural commodification in which radical desires were co-opted by capitalism and marketed back to would-be rebels in the form of politically innocuous lifestyle choices. Hence the tone of disillusionment that suffuses Bookchin's writing in this period, accompanied by an uncharacteristic nostalgia for 'the Left that was'. Ironically, even as he presses the case for a revival of a rationalist politics oriented towards the achievement of a rational society – and sharply distinguishes this from the 'irrationalism' of lifestyle anarchism – his own political outlook is shaped by an unmistakably lyrical recollection of the lost Left of his youth, with its libertarian schools, bookshops, presses, cafés, theatres, unions, and all the other institutional and symbolic paraphernalia of a genuinely revolutionary counterculture that nourished a wider revolutionary movement. Contra Bookchin's own intentions, this moving celebration of a complex, resilient, radically democratic, predominantly working class, implacably anti-capitalist, enveloping, and yet fundamentally open anarchist counterculture is an important element of his later work that we may wish to rescue from the polemical critique of lifestyle anarchism in which it is articulated. It also recalls the generous and remarkably consistent revolutionary social vision that animated both his earlier and later political writings, and so calls into question the rather cynical arguments of those who point to changes in his position over time as evidence of cynical political opportunism.

Far more persuasive than the charges of either theoretical inconsistency or political opportunism is the contrary argument that Bookchin grew *too* rigid in his thinking, and that this theoretical rigidity blinded him to empirical evidence pointing to political conclusions very different from those which he came to regard as axiomatic. Consider, for example, the autonomous social movements that played such an influential part in European countercultural politics in the 1980s. These important but understudied social movements were prominent in Italy, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland and West Germany at a time when Bookchin was lamenting the decline of revolutionary politics and decrying the ascendancy of lifestyle-oriented individualism. Interestingly, they combined elements of both in pursuit of the aims of subverting nation-states and their representative structures of government, and replacing the existing world system with anti-systemic forms of

participatory democracy meant to facilitate greater individual and community control over everyday life. At their best, as Georgy Katsiaficas points out, they accentuated the universal content of single-issue identity politics, and aided the revolutionary development from within these particularistic streams of a new *concrete* universalism – one produced by immanent critiques, rather than imposed from the outside. Yet Bookchin repeatedly criticised activists such as the German Autonomen for their theoretical and organisational unsophistication, failing to see that the absence of rigid ideological affiliations and organisational structures could be a political strength rather than a weakness (e.g. in terms of encouraging ideological diversity, a closer connection between theory and grassroots practice, increased flexibility and speed of action without approval from above, and greater organisational resistance to police infiltration and state repression) (Katsiaficas, 2006, pp. 3-4, 187-196, 250-251, 286).

Bookchin's ideological preconceptions also blinded him to alternative readings of the history of the decline of the revolutionary political movements of the 1960s. Rather than inquire into the complex economic, political, and cultural reasons why these movements had faded, Bookchin heaped blame on the lifestyle-oriented individualism of the counterculture, and turned with ferocious vehemence on precisely those individuals who (whatever the limitations of their work) were attempting to keep the anarchist flame alive in a period of severe social reaction. In so doing, he at least partially lost sight of the truths that while individualism and collectivism are in constant tension with one another in anarchist thought – as indeed they are in any functioning, free society – this tension is potentially a creative and constructive one, and that were any attempt to eliminate it entirely to succeed it would mean the loss of one of the ideology's most distinctive and attractive features.

What is true of anarchism in general is also true of anarchist communism in particular. For, as numerous scholars have observed, a key attraction of anarchist communism is its emphasis on the equal and paramount value of both individualism and community, personal autonomy and social solidarity, individual freedom and responsibility to others, together with a history of theoretical argument and practical experimentation intended to demonstrate how and why a reconciliation between self and society might be approximated but never fully achieved (Sabia, 2005, p. 112; see also Clark, 2009). In fairness to Bookchin, he did at times recognise and acknowledge approvingly the importance attached to individual freedom

and personal autonomy in the social anarchist tradition. In the late 1990s, for example, he responded to criticism of *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* by observing that social anarchists have consistently championed the cause of these values (or, as he somewhat defensively and grudgingly put the point, ‘never denied the importance of gaining individual freedom and personal autonomy’) – albeit while also consistently arguing that they will remain chimerical unless sweeping revolutionary changes are made that provide the social foundations for ‘rounded and ethically committed individuals’ (Bookchin, 1998). However, he refused to entertain the possibility that more individualistically inclined anarchists could be sympathetic to both individual freedom and responsibility to others, and instead portrayed them in entirely one-dimensional and derogatory terms.

BEYOND THE SOCIAL ANARCHISM/LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM DICHOTOMY

Contrary to what the Bookchin of *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* would have us believe, both the collectivist and the individualist tendencies of anarchism are very much alive and thriving at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The revolutionary personalist spirit of the American anarchist counterculture that he once praised lives on in the decentralised networks of the alter-globalisation movement, as well as in countless experiments in co-operative production and distribution, alternative media and art, and collective living. Some of the new countercultural forms that anarchists have helped to develop since the 1970s have been primarily oppositional, designed to impede the flows of neo-liberal state and corporate power or subvert its cultural expressions. Examples of such strategies and tactics include billboard subversion, the performance of live plays in front of surveillance cameras, hacktivism, and the creative use of transformative play to disrupt international financial meetings. Other contemporary, anarchist-inspired countercultural forms are consciously intended to prefigure or create alternatives to capitalism and the state. Examples include affinity groups, Temporary Autonomous Zones such as the carnivalesque Reclaim the Streets protests and the European Climate Camps, the co-operative movement, informal community networks like communal kitchens and gardens and neighbourhood assemblies, eco-communes, and the ever-growing network of Independent Media Centres and Social Centres.

Following the logic of Bookchin's 1995 polemic, one would have to dismiss all of these creative and hopeful and very exciting developments as instances of political reaction. Insofar as they fail to adhere to his four-point programme, or go beyond it by embracing both individual autonomy and social freedom in a way different than social anarchists have done in the past, then by definition they cannot be revolutionary and so must be rejected as a form of retrograde lifestyle anarchism. But this of course begs the question of what one means by the term 'revolution'. Must we conceive of revolution solely or even primarily in insurrectionary terms as a concentrated and decisive armed attack on the centres of political and economic power, or can we instead conceive of it in far more broadly *social* terms, involving most fundamentally (but by no means exclusively!) a long-term process of profound attitudinal change? And if so, wouldn't such change have to begin at the level of the individual spirit?

Far from being an example of the sort of lifestyle anarchist mysticism and solipsism decried by Bookchin, such a conception of revolution is in fact supported by some of the most politically sophisticated and historically well-informed strategic thinking of our time. In his book *Powerful Peacemaking: A Strategy for a Living Revolution*, for example, George Lakey proposes a developmental model of revolutionary movement that grows organically over time, with each successive stage building on the previous one. More specifically, he identifies five core stages of what he calls a 'living revolution': cultural preparation, organisation-building, confrontation, mass economic and political noncooperation and parallel institutions. Being an eminently practical thinker, Lakey understands that only a strong and united people's organisation with a revolutionary programme can provide the new life that becomes the new society. However, he also recognises that meaningful social change is ultimately rooted in a loving transformation of the individual spirit. As he points out in the introduction to the book, 'I find in this area as in so many that the feminist principle, "the personal is political", is sound' (Lakey, 1987, p. xv).

It is in this linking of the personal and the political, I believe, that we find what is most interesting in the anarchist currents in the newest social movements. Yes, one can find numerous examples of purely narcissistic and hedonistic behaviour, but one can also find countless counter-examples of radical struggles that begin at the micro level but that promise or demand much wider social transforma-

tion. Consider, for instance, the post-1968 squatters' movement in Europe, which has frequently been derided by Left-oriented critics as a juvenile and apolitical form of lifestyle anarchism. On the one hand, most squatters have openly rejected classical revolutionary projects and parties, especially when these aspired to create new state forms (Martínez López, 2007, p. 7). They have also by and large rejected a self-sacrificial form of utopianism that projected liberation from existing forms of domination onto a distant, conflict-free future. On the other hand, many squatters have also called themselves 'revolutionaries' and emphasised their commitment to ideals and utopian projects extending beyond the places squatted – for example, solidarity with others in the local community fighting against unbridled real estate speculation in favour of decent housing and self-managed social spaces for all (Martínez López, 2007, pp. 7-8, 12). In other words, they have committed themselves to short-run utopias, specific projects of urban transformation, and especially a whole revolutionary change of their own lives.

This utopianism of the 'here and now' should not be dismissed lightly. Nor, I believe, should it be lauded uncritically. In a positive vein, it signals the rise of a strongly open-ended tendency in anarchist thinking critical of the idea of revolutionary closure – the idea, in other words, that 'after the revolution' social relations would be seamlessly and enduringly harmonised. It also reflects a pragmatic recognition that revolutionary struggles rooted in grassroots projects that address people's immediate needs and help them to confront the sources of alienation in their everyday lives are much more likely to succeed than those in which activists are expected to sacrifice themselves on the altar of a distant utopia (Gordon, 2009). More worryingly, it suggests a tendency among contemporary activists to throw out the baby of fundamental revolutionary social change (and the solidarities, political strategies, personal sacrifices, and extended utopian temporal horizons it necessarily entails) along with the bath water of perfectionist utopian illusions.

To this extent, there may well be a kernel of truth in Bookchin's polemical critique of contemporary anarchism after all. But the way in which he conveys his argument is both misleading and politically unhelpful. This is so not only because of its many historical inaccuracies and simplistic theoretical dichotomies, but also because it demeans and vilifies the efforts of those who – however tentatively and falteringly – are attempting to build bridges between the personal and the political

aspects of libertarian revolutionary social change. We are thus well advised to recall the spirit of his earlier writings, in which as a committed revolutionary theorist he attempted to engage in creative and constructive dialogue with some of the most innovative and radical countercultural social movements that contributed to the rebellions of 1968.

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Poetic Licence: Hugo Ball, the Anarchist Avant-garde, and Us

Roger Farr

ABSTRACT

This paper draws on Dada poet Hugo Ball's diary *Flight Out of Time* to recompose his fragmentary writing on anarchism for two purposes: first, to establish the nature and extent of Dada's entanglement with the European anarchist movement; second, to demonstrate how Ball's attempts to articulate linkages between social and discursive orders led him to anticipate developments in poststructuralist theory. I conclude with an assessment of Ball's work in relation to contemporary anarchist praxis.

Keywords *Dada, Hugo Ball, poetics, avant-garde*

INTRODUCTION

I have examined myself carefully. I could never bid chaos welcome, throw bombs, blow up bridges, and do away with ideas. I am not an anarchist. (Ball 1974: 19)

Despite this apparent disavowal of anarchism, Hugo Ball occupies a pivotal, if somewhat conflicted, position in the history of twentieth-century anarchist thought. As a founding figure of Dada, one of the most notoriously iconoclastic movements of the Modernist avant-garde, Ball was a pioneer of performance art, sound poetry, concrete poetry and automatic writing. In his role as a scholar and intellectual, Ball was the author of several books and dozens of essays, dealing with

contemporary issues in politics, cultural history, aesthetics and philosophy. As an activist, he was the driving force behind the establishment of the Cabaret Voltaire (Lenin's infamous rowdy neighbour in Zurich), which, like New York's celebrated Ferrer Centre, has been described as 'an educational institution with anarcho-cultural aims'.¹ He was also a contributing editor to some of the most important radical journals of his time, publishing his poetry and critical works alongside well-known anarchists Erich Mühsam, Otto Gross, Gustav Landauer and Fritz Brupacher. And yet, despite these credentials, the contours of his work remain almost universally ignored in surveys of anarchism.

This lack of attention may be a consequence of the contradictory dimensions of Ball's thought: on the one hand, that of the young, anarcho-Dada poet, and on the other, that of the older, jaded reactionary. Indeed, it is not uncommon for studies of Ball's life and work to track a political narrative which begins with his early interest in Nietzsche and Stirner, peaks with his involvement with the German and Swiss anarchist movements between 1915-1919, and concludes with mental illness, poverty, and religious conservatism (the last stage being a cruelly ironic fulfilment, one critic has observed, of Dada's anti-Art stance).² Curiously, with the notable exception of Philip Mann's *Hugo Ball: An Intellectual Biography* (1987), which dedicates an entire chapter to Ball's politics, Erdmute White's indispensable *Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet* (1998), and David Weir's brief but astute discussion in *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism* (1997), many of these studies adopt an apologetic tone when they turn to the question of how anarchism inflected his work. For instance, in his forward to Ball's diary *Flight Out of Time* the respected Dada scholar John Elderfield acknowledges only a 'general connection'³ between Zurich Dada and the anarchist movement, despite the clear evidence of direct connections in Ball's diary; in fact, Ball elsewhere had claimed that 'anarchy in thought, art and politics' was the book's 'main subject'.⁴ In his overview of Ball's career, Elderfield writes that, despite its many flaws and contradictions, the one 'positive aspect' of Ball's later work (which is marked by a rejection of radicalism in any form, political and aesthetic) is its 'recognition that anarchy itself cannot be a goal – a necessary rebellion, perhaps, but no final solution'.⁵ Why this should be viewed as a 'positive' development is not explained. Similarly, Gerhardt Steinke, in his otherwise informative *Life and*

Work of Hugo Ball (1967), writes that while Ball's radical poetics 'served to open up the path to the practice of anarchism, it also brought about a break with true reality, a spiritual derailment which meant living in a world that more closely corresponded to a dream reality'.⁶ This unqualified and rather clichéd dismissal of anarchism as a kind of naïve 'utopian socialism' leads Steinke to conclude that '[i]n the last analysis, Ball's vehement striving as a Dadaist was merely a secret subterfuge by which he meant to assert his own ego and to reinstate his own self'.⁷ Yet Ball's demand was precisely the opposite: artists, he declared, must 'Discard the Ego like a coat full of holes'⁸, and further, sounding rather like an early Adorno,⁹ poets must 'give up [their] lyrical feelings', because 'it is tactless to flaunt feelings at such a time'.¹⁰ To be fair to Steinke, Ball's diary entries on the ego and subjectivity are inconsistent, to say the least; nevertheless the inference of Steinke's and others' analyses is that Ball became more mature – more politically 'balanced' – in his later years, when he withdrew from radical politics and art to embrace reformism and theology. At any rate, putting aside for the moment the question of political affiliations, the fact remains that today Ball is not remembered for this later, more 'realistic' work, but rather for his early work in Zurich, work that was almost obsessively preoccupied with the problem of realising anarchist theory in a cultural practice. This work and this context, then, must come to the foreground in critical assessments of Ball's influence. To proceed otherwise is to contribute to what many critics see as a kind of 'black-out' of anarchist contributions (and more interestingly, *alternatives*) to twentieth-century cultural politics.¹¹

So, while keeping in mind that his thinking can be frustratingly contradictory¹², in this essay I want to recompose Ball's fragmentary thoughts on anarchism in order first, to establish the nature and extent of Dada's entanglement with the European anarchist movement and second, to demonstrate how Ball's attempts to articulate structural homologies¹³ between two orders of representational fields (the socio-political and the linguistic) led him to anticipate developments in post-structuralist theory, which in turn has a bearing on contemporary anarchist praxis. In order to establish the third term, or 'missing link' between these two fields – what might be called Ball's *anarcho-poiesis*, or 'anarchist poetics' – my reading of his diary will take its methodological cues from the dissonant form of the work itself; for, as Ball writes, 'thinking can also be an art, subject to the laws of art –

provided that one directs one's attention ... to fixing limits; to giving space and substance only to certain observations and avoiding others'.¹⁴

'LET US REWRITE LIFE EVERYDAY'

Ball's unsubmitted dissertation on Nietzsche, written at the University of Munich in 1910, served as an introduction both to the collectivist anarchism of Kropotkin and Bakunin, and the individualist tendencies developed by Stirner. Although little is known about the details of the dissertation, what does seem clear is that Ball was deeply influenced by Nietzsche's rejection of abstraction and instrumental reason, a negation that Ball extended to an analysis of the state form:

There is an unpleasant relationship between politics and rationalism. Perhaps the State is the mainstay of reason, and vice versa. All political reasoning, as far as it aims at norm and reform, is utilitarian. [But] the state is only a commodity ... Nietzsche assails the church and left the state alone. That was a big mistake.¹⁵

Unlike most anarchists of his day, and perhaps many today as well, Ball regarded the state more as an *effect* than a cause: it was 'only a commodity' – a reified image of abstract reason and the market, propped up by bankrupt metaphysical theories, which Ball described as being merely 'the arithmetic feats of their inventors'.¹⁶ This view of the state as an edifice supported by an elaborate but flimsy philosophical scaffolding prompted Ball to turn his attention to other, even more insidious locations of power, and it is in this move that his work resonates with certain strains of contemporary anarchist theory.

In *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism*, for example, Todd May argues that while anarchist theory seems at times to conceptualize power as 'bad' and freedom as 'good' – a model that would link anarchist philosophy to liberal utilitarianism, which, as Saul Newman points out, is precisely how Nietzsche viewed it¹⁷ – one can also detect a 'tactical', as opposed to 'strategic' approach to political *struggle*. Whereas a strategic approach, May argues, 'involves a unitary analysis that aims towards a single goal',¹⁸ a tactical approach grows from the recognition that power is exercised at all levels of society, dispersed both horizontally and vertically, and therefore cannot be reduced to one particular site or

goal: '[a]narchist political intervention', May writes, 'issues from a recognition of the network character of relationships of power and of the variety of intertwined but irreducible oppressions that devolve upon those relationships'.¹⁹ Similarly, for Ball, the anarchist critique of power should not *only* be directed at the state, which was for him largely an exterior form, a secondary order of representation predicated on a deeper alienation which lay in the teleology of political reason and discourse itself; thus, Ball argued that anarchists must also attend to the operations of 'purposive-rationality', the *discursive* mode that sustains the political philosophies used to legitimize the state and the current social contract in popular opinion. This focus on reason and discourse led Ball to conclude that '[a] revolt in materialistic philosophy is more necessary than a revolt of the masses'.²⁰ Here Ball moved far too hastily, and seems to have chosen to ignore at least half of his favoured anarchist's view of the state: for in an 1869 letter Ball certainly would have been familiar with, Bakunin had defined the State as 'an abstraction which destroys living society [and] consumes the life of the people'.²¹ He also stresses, however, that 'for an abstraction to be born, develop, and continue to exist in the real world, there must be a real collective body interested in its existence'. This 'body', for Bakunin, is 'the governing and property-owning class' – hardly an abstraction.²² Nevertheless, for Ball, the discourse of politics itself also had to become the terrain of a metonymic struggle for autonomy: 'Adopt symmetries and rhythms instead of principles', he declared, '[o]ppose world systems and acts of state by transforming them into a phrase ... Let us rewrite life everyday'.²³ In this struggle over the discursive composition of everyday life, the iron law of textual (and, to read paradigmatically, *social*) cohesion, which is dependent upon the 'subordination' of clauses to 'main points', of prepositions and conjunctions to nouns and verbs, etc., must be broken through a radical experimentation with the language of critique. Spontaneously constructed durations of sound and indeterminate syntax would disrupt the official languages of communication, which had become saturated with capitalist ideology: 'The word has become a commodity', he wrote on June 16th, 1915. 'We must give up writing second-hand: that is, accepting words (to say nothing of sentences) that are not newly invented for our own use'.²⁴

'THE INDIVIDUAL VOCABLES AND SOUNDS REGAIN THEIR AUTONOMY'

Ball's turn to language as a site of struggle for liberation, while certainly indebted to his reading of Nietzsche, was also informed by his contact with the work of the German anarchist Gustav Landauer, whom he had met in 1915:

Meeting with Gustav Landauer. An elderly, emaciated man with a floppy hat and a sparse beard. He has an air of pastoral gentleness about him. The next-to-last generation. Socialist theories as a refuge for noble minds. An antiquated impression ... [there] are only three anarchists in Germany and he is one of them.²⁵

By this time, Landauer had already published 'Destroying the State by Creating Socialism' in *Der Sozialist* (1910), an important work of anarchist theory which is known today mostly because of its treatment in Martin Buber's *Paths In Utopia*.²⁶ In this remarkably prophetic tract Landauer declares that radicals should 'under no circumstances have anything to do with politics,' which he defines as 'the rule of the privileged with the help of fictions'.²⁷ In place of such 'politics,' Landauer calls for a 'direct affinity of real interests,' and a radical defection from any dependence on, or expectations of, the state. For although it presents itself as a 'thing,' for Landauer – and for Ball – the state was more effectively *resisted* when it was understood as 'a relationship between human beings, a way by which people relate to one another'.²⁸ Anarchists can destroy this thing-that-is-not-a-thing, Landauer argues, by 'entering into new relationships, by *behaving differently*, [because] we are the state – and are it as long as we are not otherwise, as long as we have not created the institutions that constitute a genuine community and society of human beings'.

Although Landauer's work has remained somewhat obscure for many years, there are signs that it is becoming relevant again within contemporary anarchist theory. For instance in *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, Richard Day argues that Landauer's work warrants closer attention today for its 'deep break [with] the logic of hegemony,' a logic which can only conceptualise social transformation within an either/or binary schema: either state seizure (orthodox Marxism) or state reform (liberalism). By 'analyzing the state as a set of relationships,' Day explains, Landauer anticipates the post-structuralist recognition (cf. May) that 'we all govern each other via a complex web of capillary

relations of power'.²⁹ For Landauer, and for Ball, this meant that 'no language [could] be loud and decisive enough for the uplifting of our compatriots, so that they may be incited out of their engrained daily drudgery. A renewed social form must be spurred on ... energetic action, designed to break barriers ... *that* is propaganda of the deed'.³⁰ Thus, contrary to accounts of the avant-garde as an entirely negative and nihilistic tendency, it is quite clear that Ball's early work was motivated by a sympathetic reading of anarchist theory in which he stressed the *creative* agency referred to in Bakunin's famous formulation, 'the urge to destroy is also a creative urge'.

In fact, as early as 1914, Ball had launched a major study of Bakunin's *oeuvre* – known today as the *Bakunin-Brevier* – and this work occupied him continuously during his participation in the early Dada activities at the Cabaret Voltaire. The first reference to this study appears in November, 1914. An entry recorded shortly after, on the fourth of December, refers specifically to Max Nettlau's biography of Bakunin,³¹ which Ball later obtained in a four-volume, handwritten edition, with a forward by Landauer, from the Swiss anarchist Fritz Brupbacher,³² along with a complete edition of Bakunin's writings.³³ Ball continued to work steadily on his Bakunin book, and on the 28th of November, 1916, he approached the publisher Rene Schickele, and asked: 'if you publish Bakunin, may I do it? I have been working on him for years'.³⁴ Schickele apparently agreed, but backed out only a year later. In place of the Bakunin study, Schickele advised Ball to write 'a book on the "German Intellectuals"',³⁵ which was eventually published as *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (1919)³⁶ and which is said to have significantly influenced Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch, whom Ball introduced to one another in 1917.³⁷

While the Bakunin study occupied Ball's attention throughout his early years and kept him in close contact with prominent German and Swiss anarchists, it was Proudhon, whom Ball had encountered only through secondary sources and conversation, who eventually piqued his interest in extending an anarchist critique of language into a artistic practice. On the 7 January 1915, Ball made an entry in his diary that appears to prophesy aspects of the compositional method of the ground-breaking poems he would perform a year later at the Cabaret Voltaire, a performance which effectively launched Dada as an artistic movement. I will quote this salient passage at length:

Proudhon, that father of anarchism, seems to have been the first to understand its stylistic consequences. I am curious to read something by him. For once it is recognized that the word was the first discipline, this leads to a fluctuating style that avoids substantives and shuns concentration. The separate parts of the sentence, even the individual vocables and sounds regain their autonomy. Perhaps one day it will be the task of language to demonstrate the absurdity of this doctrine.

The language forming process would be left to its own resources. Intellectual criticism would have to be dropped, assertions would be bad, and so would every conscious distribution of accents. Symmetry would presumably cease; harmonizing would depend on impulse. No traditions or laws could apply. I do not think it is easy for a consistent anarchist to achieve harmony between person and doctrine, between style and conviction. And yet ... *the style of an author should represent his philosophy, without his expressly developing it.*³⁸

Although we cannot locate any reference to specific works by Proudhon in Ball's diary, it does not seem a great stretch of the critical imagination to suggest that Ball pursued this hypothesis about the confluence between literary and political forms in the year leading up to his performances at Cabaret Voltaire. Indeed, his diary shows that the necessity of articulating a link between anarchist theory and literary composition tormented him during this time: 'I can find no compromise between socialism and art', he wrote in March, 1917, '[w]here is the path of social productivity for this art? An application of its principles that would be more than applied art? My artistic and political studies seem to be at variance with one another, and yet my only concern is to find the bridge...'³⁹

Ball attempted to build this 'bridge' between his cultural practices and his anarchism in a number of ways. One of the more striking examples is the seditious anti-war poem 'Totentanz 1916', the performance of which involved organizing a 'Revolutionary Chorus' – a group of young militants affiliated with Brupacher and his anarcho-syndicalist magazine *The Revoluzzer*⁴⁰ – to recite the poem alongside a well-known Prussian march. Following the performance, which was immensely popular, the poem was printed on leaflets and dropped from airplanes (by the French military!) on German troops, in an attempt to convince them to lay down their arms and defect from the army.⁴¹ Less dramatically, Ball also organized performances of songs by Erich Mühsam,⁴² the important German anarchist who

would be arrested only months later when he made a speech to ten thousand factory workers in Munich, calling for a general strike against the war.

His attempts did not stop there, however. Eventually, Ball's writing broke with any attempt to argue its politics in conventionally political terms; instead, he wanted language *to demonstrate* an anarchist critique, by allowing 'individual vocables and sounds [to] regain their autonomy'.⁴³ By establishing a connection between 'person and doctrine', and overcoming the distinction between art and life, poetry might finally live up to its potential, in the words of the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem, 'as the revolutionary act *par excellence*'.⁴⁴ One attempt at such an *anarcho-poiesis* was Ball's now well-known piece 'Gadji Beri Bimba',⁴⁵ one of a series of sound poems which attempted to demonstrate how language might operate once it had defected from the demands of conventional semantic productivity – a kind of 'refusal of work' via a *refusal of words*:

gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori
 gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini
 gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim
 gadjama tuffm i zimzalla binban gligla wowolimai bin beri ban
 o katalominai rhinozerossola hopsamen laulitalomini hoooo
 gadjama rhinozerossola hopsamen
 bluku terullala blaulala loooo

zimzim urullala zimzim urullala zimzim zanzibar zimzalla zam
 elifantolim brussala bulomen brussala bulomen tromtata
 velo da bang band affalo purzamai affalo purzamai lengado tor
 gadjama bimbalo glandridi glassala zingtata pimpalo ögrögöööö
 viola laxato viola zimbrabim viola uli paluji malooo

tuffm im zimbrabim negramai bumbalo negramai bumbalo tuffm i zim
 gadjama bimbala oo beri gadjama gaga di gadjama affalo pinx
 gaga di bumbalo bumbalo gadjamen
 gaga di bling blong gaga blung

In his carnivalesque performances of these works, which completely shocked the bourgeois theatre-goers of Zurich, Ball was demonstrating how the social order,

conceived of as a set of relationships and practices, was maintained in part through its reproduction in a *discursive* order which denied expression to emergent forms of radical subjectivity. The maintenance of conventional syntax, the demand that language be always referential – that words under capital must always labour to reproduce the conventions of social meaning – was, to Ball, partially responsible for our inability to articulate, let alone imagine, a radical alternative: '[l]anguage as a social organ can be destroyed without the creative process having to suffer. In fact, it seems that the creative powers even benefit from it'.⁴⁶ In this sense, Ball's work lends itself as evidence to an observation made later by Julia Kristeva, that 'certain currents of anarchism did not confine themselves to opposing existing social and state structures alone, but also propounded the necessity of a profound transformation in the very conception of the speaking-subject'.⁴⁷

The desire to experience such a transformation led Ball to utilize poetry as part of a broader project of cultural de-programming, an 'erasure' of the social texts that interpellate and constitute the subject under capital:

'Know thyself? As if it were so simple! As if only good will and introspection were needed. An individual can compare himself, see himself, and correct himself wherever an eternal ideal is firmly anchored in closely-knit forms of education and culture, of literature and politics. But what if ... *all the voices in the symphony are at variance with one another*? Who will know himself then? Who will find himself then?

It is necessary for me to drop all respect for tradition, opinion, and judgement.
*It is necessary for me to erase the rambling text that others have written.*⁴⁸

Clearly there is a 'nihilistic' impulse behind such a project; however, such an observation must go further. For when it is read as an attempt to advance a new model of communication, a tentative model informed by and gesturing towards anarchist theory, Ball's work can be seen to encourage both the performer and the audience to participate in the decentralised and fluid anti-authoritarian subjectivities that emerge only in those revolutionary moments and situations where the world is turned upside down, such as the one Bakunin famously described in his *Confession to the Tzar*, a text with which Ball was very familiar:⁴⁹

It was a festival without beginning or end; I saw everyone and no one, for each individual was lost in the same enormous strolling crowd; I spoke to everyone *without remembering either my own words or those spoken by others*, because everyone's attention was absorbed at every step by new objects and events, and by unexpected news.⁵⁰

At worst, such a project is hopelessly utopian, offering weird poetry as cerebral compensation for 'real' social change; at best, it is a cogent critique of the extent to which the social order reproduces itself in part through the maintenance of psycho-linguistic uniformity. The deciding factor, I think, lies in the relevance of Ball's work to contemporary anarchist praxis.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The critique of political discourse and reason advanced by the anarchist avant-garde poses a significant challenge to traditional models of communication, models which many radicals would find hard to abandon. Anarchists have long recognized that communication is an integral element of social organization, and the anarchist project, as Landauer and many others have stressed, is aimed largely towards the development of new forms of social relations, new forms of *community*, based on the essentially open-communicative concepts of mutual aid, free association, and autonomy. In this respect, classical anarchism is a rational, if somewhat wayward, child of the Enlightenment.

However, it is also evident that in the current period of advanced capitalist globalisation 'communicational development ... is no longer one of "enlightenment" in all its connotations, but rather of new technologies'.⁵¹ In other words, as Ball warned us almost a century ago, language 'has become a commodity', and capital has colonised everyday life to the extent that not only words themselves but the very act of communication itself now mimics, or rather *animates*, the processes of capitalist production. In what linguists have identified as 'the conduit metaphor', a metaphor which frames the way we talk about language, communication is described as a channel, a conduit, a conveyor belt along which 'a sender' tries to 'get a message across' to a passive 'receiver' who 'decodes' it.⁵² For anarchists, the significance of this transformation of communication from an act of

‘mutual enlightenment’ into a reified instrument of exchange cannot be ignored. In fact, because of the ambivalence in the anarchist conception of power as outlined by May, anarchist theory may be especially receptive to the recognition that the terrain of struggle has spread from the factory floor to a much wider ‘social factory’, as the autonomist Marxists have called it: a dispersed site of fully socialised production which relies heavily upon the rationalisation and reification of language and communication to keep it functioning.

Certain currents of contemporary anarchism have already entered this terrain. Alfredo Bonanno, for instance, describes how the ‘greatly increased speed of productive operations’ resulting from the intensification of organic capital in the form of information technology cleaves the proletariat into two new social strata, ‘the included and the excluded’, and brings about an important ‘cultural and linguistic modification.’⁵³ Unlike previous stages of capitalist stratification, these new ‘classes’ are distinguished primarily by their relationship to the dominant *language* rather than by their position within the economic order. Moreover, as Bonanno recognises, the expansion of global capital has required the break down of community, the destruction of any kind of ‘common language’, the denial of the excluded from the language of the programmers and financiers, and subsequently, the denial of any of the material benefits of advanced capitalist production. ‘The ghettos of the future,’ he writes, ‘will not necessarily be geographically circumscribed, as the hotbeds of unrest are farmed out to bleak and manageable dimensions, but will be culturally defined, through their lack of means of communication with the rest of capitalist society.’⁵⁴ In his recent *Capital and Language*, the autonomous-Marxist economist Christian Marazzi draws a similar conclusion: ‘[i]n the post-Fordist context, in which language has become in every respect an instrument of the production of commodities and, therefore, the *material* condition of our very lives, the loss of the ability to speak, of the “language capacity”, means the loss of belonging in the world as such, the loss of what “communifies” the many who constitute the community.’⁵⁵ But Bonanno does not exactly lament this situation: as an anarchist, he does not put his hope in legal instruments or rights, which are rightly viewed as discursive forms extended by capital and the state in order to maintain the illusion of a dialogue rooted in so-called ‘common interests’. As Lacan quipped in 1968, ‘there is no such thing as dialogue, it is a swindle.’⁵⁶ Thus, while the included may attempt to provide a bogus social

consensus by allowing the occasional collective agreement to be signed, or by providing 'a pre-fabricated language to allow a partial and sclerotised use of some of the dominant technology',⁵⁷ they will not be able to stop what has been set in motion by the destruction of a common language and the withering of the Enlightenment values that have buttressed western civilization for the last four hundred years. In this light, we might understand the Invisible Committee's recent warning that '[t]here will be no social solution to the present situation ... because there's no longer any language for common experience. And we cannot share wealth if we do not share a language'.⁵⁸ If anarchist social transformation is to be successful, or *thorough*, it will, as Ball pointed out, require the development of a tactical language capable of precisely this 'communising' task – a post-capitalist language 'newly invented for our own use'.

CONCLUSION

It must be said in closing that the avant-garde anarchism propagated by Ball is not without its problems. Like other radicals of his time, Ball could not predict the extraordinary ability of capitalist social democracies to recuperate those cultural and linguistic practices which seek to resist the accumulation of surplus value; indeed, as Nicholas Thoburn points out, '[the] essence of capital is that it continually sets free its lines of flight ... to open new territories for exploitation'.⁵⁹ Distressingly, this 'flight' is usually piloted by some of the most inventive elements in society: artists, scientists, poets, activists, philosophers and all kinds of dreamers. Moreover, history suggests that social movements rooted in spontaneity and irrationalism can take nasty right-turns, to put it mildly. But we must be careful here not to foreclose on our dreams by inducing from the nightmares of European civilization a universal prohibition against spontaneity and experimentation as positive and decisive elements in genuinely anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist political struggle. Indeed, it could be argued that to confuse anarchist-inflected *anti-rationalism* with 'mystical' or fascist *irrationalism* is to commit an ethnocentric fallacy: what was true once for Europe becomes true for everyone, forever.

For in the final analysis, if it is true that capital must continually decompose and then restructure standardised communication in order to maintain just enough cooperation as is needed to coordinate production, then the defection

from this process in favour of the development of autonomous communication models and networks, whatever they look or sound like, emerges as a viable, if limited, tactic. Thus, in terms of its relevance to contemporary anarchist praxis, what may be of lasting significance in Ball's work is his attention to language and communication as vital sites of anti-authoritarian critique and intervention, and his life-long commitment to '[experimenting with] areas of philosophy and of life that our environment – so rational and precocious – scarcely let[s] us dream of'.⁶⁰

Thanks to Jesse Cohn for including an early version of this paper in the 2004 MMLA panel on Anarchism in Literature, where it was first presented, and to the small group of St Louis anarchists who turned up; to Robert Graham for reading a subsequent draft and clarifying a few points; and to Jerry Zaslove for his advice.

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NOTES

1. David Weir, *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism*, Amherst: Massachusetts UP (1997), p. 233.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
3. John Elderfield, introduction to Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, New York: Viking, (1974) p. xxxvii.
4. Quoted in Erdmute Wenzel White, *Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet*, Columbia, SC: Camden House, (1998) p. 181.

5. Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, ed. Elderfield, p. xxxix. Subsequently, Ball.
6. Gerhard Edward Steinke, *The Life and Work of Hugo Ball*, The Hague: Mouton (1967), p. 54.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
8. Ball, p. 29
9. 'The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.' Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, Boston, MA: MIT Press, (1982), p. 34.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 27
11. There have been several attempts to correct this critical gap in the last decade; see especially Antliff, Blechman, Casey, Madlec, and Weir.
12. As Tom Morris writes, '[f]ew documents so well reveal the stress lines of the social within the critically conscious self'. 'Bursting the Foundations' in Arthur Efron (ed.) *Paunch* 55-56, Buffalo: SUNY English Department (1980), p. 86.
13. The term 'structural homology' is used by Pierre Bourdieu to articulate linkages in power relations across distinct conceptual and social fields. See *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1977).
14. Quoted in White, p. 187.
15. Ball, pp. 12; 21.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 12
17. See Saul Newman, 'Anarchism and the Politics of Ressentiment', in John Moore and Spencer Sunshine, eds., *I am Not a Man, I am Dynamite: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, NY: Autonomedia (2004), pp. 107-126.
18. Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism*, Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, (1994), p. 10
19. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
20. Ball, p. 13.
21. Mikhail Bakunin, 'What is the State?' In Robert Graham, ed. *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, volume I: *From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE to 1939)* Montreal: Black Rose Books, (2005), pp 87. Subsequently Graham.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Ball, p. 56.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 26; 71.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Only four years later Ball would note bitterly in his diary: 'Landauer too has been assassinated' (p. 165). The other two anarchists could be Müsham, Brupacher, or Bloch, or perhaps Ball himself.

26. Graham, p. 164.
27. *Ibid.* Landauer's formulation precedes Gramsci's use of 'hegemony' by several decades. For a lucid exposition and critique of 'the logic of hegemony', see Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, Toronto: Between the Lines (2005).
28. Graham, p. 165.
29. Day, p. 125.
30. Gustav Landauer, 'Anarchism in Germany'. In Stephen Bender and Gabriel Kuhn (eds. and trans.), *Anarchism in Germany and Other Essays*, San Francisco: Barbary Coast Collective n.d., p. 17.
31. Max Nettlau, *Michael Bakunin: Eine Biographie*. Completed between 1896 and 1900, only 50 original copies are said to exist. A German facsimile was published in the 1970s. See Paul Avrich, 'Bakunin and the United States,' *International Review of Social History*, XXIV (1979), pp. 320–40.
32. Brupacher was an associate of Kropotkin, Nettlau and Trotsky, and is best known for his *Marx und Bakunin: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der internationalen Arbeiterassoziation* (Birk, München 1922). In his diary Ball offers some brief but noteworthy commentary on Brupacher's book: 'Characteristic of the style of the book is a sentence about the Jurassier, the anarchistic avant-garde: "They were not", it says, "emaciated factory workers, but people whose circumstances permitted them the luxury of possessing a bit of desire for liberty". The value of the book is in sentences like that one: his ironical indulgence towards the Marxists, his hesitant sympathy with Bakunin's impatient excesses'. Ball, p. 99.
33. Ball, p. 96.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
36. Translated into English by Brian Harris as *Critique of the German Intelligensia*, New York, Columbia, University Press, (1993).
37. White, p. 14.
38. Ball, p. 22. Emphasis added.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
40. White, p. 59.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
42. Ball, p. 52.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
44. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Seattle and London: Left Bank & Rebel (1983), p. 146.

45. A performance of this poem, which must be heard to be fully appreciated, is available on-line at <<http://www.ubu.com/sound/ball.html>>. I am quoting the poem as it appears in Jerome and Pierre Joris Rotenberg eds., *Poems for the Millenium*, vol. 1, Berkeley: California University Press (1995), p. 296.
46. Ball, p. 76.
47. Julia Kristeva, 'The Revolt of Mallarmé', in Robert Greer Cohn ed. *Mallarmé in the Twentieth Century*, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London: Associated University Presses (1998), p. 44.
48. Ball, p. 35. Emphasis added.
49. Although Ball would have encountered Bakunin's *Confession* by 1916, it is noteworthy that Paulette Brupacher, Fritz's wife, published a French translation in 1932 (Paris, Rieder).
50. Bakunin quoted in René Viénet, *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupations Movement, France, May '68*. New York and London: Autonomedia/Rebel (1992), p. 71. Emphasis added.
51. Fredric Jameson 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue'. In Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi eds. *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, (1998), p. 55.
52. Michael Reddy, 'The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language About Language', in Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1979), pp 164 – 201.
53. Alfredo Bonnano, *From Riot to Insurrection: An Analysis for an Anarchist Perspective Against Post-Industrial Capitalism*, trans. Jan Weir, London: Elephant Editions (1990), p. 32.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) (2008), p.131.
56. Quoted in Maud Mannoni, 'Psychoanalysis and the May Revolution', in Charles Posner ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France: 1968*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p. 215.
57. Bonanno, p. 35.
58. Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) (2008), pp. 25-26.
59. Nicholas Thoburn, *Delueze, Marx, and Politics*, London: Routledge (2003), p. 29.
60. Ball, p. 67-8.

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- . 'Destroying the State by Creating Socialism', [1910], in Robert Graham, ed. *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, volume I: *From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE to 1939)*, Montreal, Black Rose, 2005, pp. 164-67.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Anarchy: past *and* present

Direct Action: An Ethnography, AK Press 2009, 568pp

David Graeber

ISBN 978-190485979-6, £22

The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalization Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy, Pluto Press 2009, 284pp

Marianne Maeckelbergh

ISBN 978-0-7453-2925-3, £17.99

The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia, Yale University Press 2009, 442pp

John C. Scott

ISBN 978-0-300-15228-9, £20

The most exciting scholarship relevant to anarchist thought is today found in work of cultural anthropology. Recently published studies focus on two themes: the relationship between state and nonstate social organization and the anarchist prefigurative politics of the alterglobalization movement.

Yale political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Asia* recalls Pierre Clastres' *Society against the State*.¹ This is an insightful history borne of years of careful study. Scott brilliantly describes the tension between state and nonstate social organizations in the Southeast Asian region of Zomia, 'one of the largest remaining nonstate spaces in the world'.² He persuasively argues that while today most people live under state control, historically many people deliberately and successfully evaded that control.

‘Avoiding the state was, until the past few centuries, a very real option,’ Scott convincingly demonstrates.³

This history is also an account of how the anarchist counter-history of Zomia has been occluded by a state-centric ‘civilization narrative.’⁴ This narrative codes those beyond state control as ‘barbarians,’ because ‘the ethnicized barbarians represent a permanent example of a defiance of central authority [...]. They remain an example – and thus an option, a temptation – of a form of social organization outside state-based hierarchy and taxes.’⁵ Scott’s anarchist narrative effectively counters the state-endorsed civilization narrative by stressing how fervently egalitarian and autonomous peoples have evaded state control by inhabiting strategic locations and remaining mobile. Concurrently, they practice ‘escape agriculture’⁶ which focuses on crops that are less easily appropriated, and designed ‘social structures of escape,’ including ‘simpler, smaller, and more dispersed social units’ which are similarly resistant.⁷ By rewriting the history of Zomia from a nonstate standpoint Scott reveals that anarchist social organization has been sought *and* achieved by innumerable people who prefer autonomy and freedom to the states’ compulsory taxes and conscription.

Scholars and laypeople alike who consider anarchy utterly utopian will be surprised by Scott’s findings. His history of Zomia, or as he characterizes it ‘a fragment of what might properly be considered a global history of populations trying to avoid [...] the state,’⁸ demonstrates the historical authenticity of anarchist social organization. Committed anarchists will relish this confirmation. But they will also wince at Scott’s acquiescence to the inexorable expansion of state power and the concomitant diminution of social organizations existing beyond its reach. ‘In the contemporary world, the future of our freedom lies in the daunting task of taming Leviathan,’ Scott writes, ‘not evading it.’⁹ It is ironic that a study that so effectively demonstrates the success of anarchist organization concludes that it is increasingly anachronistic. Ultimately *The Art of Not Being Governed* is a work of history, an account of what is *past*.

One of those who do envision a future beyond the state is Leiden University’s lecturer in cultural anthropology Marianne Maeckelbergh. Her *The Will of the People: How the Alterglobalization Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy* is a provocative work of anarchist thought. The author focuses on the alterglobalization movement and asks: ‘What is the movement for?’¹⁰ She predictably answers

that it is challenging the theory and practice of neoliberalism. Because this question has been asked and similarly answered by numerous authors over the last decade readers may prematurely dismiss Maeckelbergh's book as unremarkable. But it *is* remarkable. It is remarkable because the author chooses to concentrate on the anarchistic and radical democratic ethos and overall strategy of 'prefigurative politics' that animates that movement. She explains 'practicing prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between struggle in the present towards a goal in the future; instead the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present.'¹¹ Maeckelbergh's ethnography chimes with anarchist thought when she concludes that the alterglobalization movement 'is not a prefiguration of an ideal society or type of community or abstract political ideology; it is a prefiguration of a process, a prefiguration of a horizontal decentralised democracy, which is at once a goal and a current practice of the movement.'¹²

Thus the book focuses on one core element of the alterglobalization movement: the *process* of collective decision-making. In so doing, the author identifies six *practices* associated with that process: prefiguration, consensus/conflict, horizontality, diversity, democracy and connectivity. Among these practices horizontality, a 'less hierarchical networked relationships of decision-making and organising structures that actively attempt to limit power inequalities', receives the most attention.¹³ On this point, Maeckelbergh correctly notes, the 'influence of anarchism' is most apparent.¹⁴ Yet it is her account of how alterglobalization activists endeavour to collapse the past and future of radical democratic theory into a radical democratic present is the most noteworthy aspect of the study. Her emphasis transforms the widespread representation of reactive anti-globalization protestors into a proactive alterglobalization movement whose participants endeavour to channel their energy into the creation of a movement which resists neoliberalism by creating an anarchist way of life here and now. Maeckelbergh is understandably reluctant to formulate a theory of the alterglobalization movement. Yet her study would benefit from more theory. The examples she cites to further her argument are less compelling than they might be because they are not integrated into an explanatory theoretical framework.

One might similarly critique London University's anthropologist/activist David Graeber's *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Here we find over five hundred pages of always insightful, often gripping, and sometimes humorous, observer-

participant accounts and analyses of participation in the alterglobalization movement. Graeber asserts that his ethnography is 'not [...] designed to advocate a single argument or theory'.¹⁵ Graeber, a serious anarchist, is conscious of the dangers associated with trying to realize a theory by force. His recent books, *A Fragment of an Anarchist Anthology* and *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*, attest to this.¹⁶ He eschews such attempts by *not* presenting a theory of anarchy; nor does he construct a hypothetical anarchist society, but similarly to Maeckelbergh offers ethnography replete with exemplars of practice illustrating how sundry forms of direct action prefigure anarchist society. Do not spend your time merely imagining an anarchist future, he intimates, live it now.

The book is divided into two parts. The first recounts Graeber's involvement – mostly in diary form – with anarchist groups including the Direct Action Network (DAN) and its 2001 Summit of the Americas protests in Québec City. While there are nuggets of insight to be found in this sprawling journal, it might have been pared down with no loss of impact. The second part functions as an analysis of the actions recounted in the first part. Graeber describes the process of the New York City DAN group meetings in revelatory detail. He also offers a wonderful list of inspired direct actions (e.g. affinity groups, bicycle parades, billboard improvement, classroom takeover, etc). He continues by discussing how these actions are problematically represented in the corporate media, how anarchists have responded, and the resultant 'mythological warfare' between the two. The concluding chapter considers 'political ontologies of the imagination', which is shorthand for thinking about how the world *might* be, rather than accepting the increasingly state-centred world that *is*.

The heart of the book, both philosophically and literally, is chapter 7: 'Direct Action, Anarchism, Direct Democracy'. Here readers find an outstanding conceptual differentiation of 'direct action' and 'civil disobedience' and, furthermore, a persuasive explanation why the practice of the former is a tactic properly associated with anarchy. As Graeber explains, 'direct action represents a certain ideal [...]. It is a form of action in which means and ends become effectively indistinguishable; a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change, in which the form of the action [...] is itself a model for the change that one wishes to bring about.'¹⁷ Echoing Maeckelbergh, Graeber's ethnography confirms that at the core of contemporary anarchy are the ideals of prefigurative politics and direct democracy.

These are powerful ideals that *may* enable anarchists to overcome a seemingly insurmountable obstacle characteristic of all organizations: the ‘iron law of oligarchy’ famously described by Robert Michels.¹⁸ This may be the most significant theoretical insight of Maeckelbergh’s and Graeber’s studies. But also analogous to Maeckelbergh’s study, Graeber supplies no substantive theoretical framework from which to appreciate the magnitude of this insight. This is somewhat frustrating.

As Scott persuasively argues, the spaces on earth where state power does not extend are rapidly vanishing. Yet, after reading these exceptional books one is likely to agree with all three authors that the state is *not* the only possible form of social organization. It appears that another world beyond the state is possible, but only if we actively choose that option and are willing to work towards its actualization. Many have already made that choice. Scott effectively shows us what was possible in the *past*. But Maeckelbergh and Graeber encourage us to imagine not only what a stateless, radical-democratic, anarchist world may look like in the future, but rather to see what it already looks like in the *present*.

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NOTES

1. Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State* (New York: Zone Books, 1989 [1974]).
2. Scott, p.13.
3. Scott, p.9.
4. See Scott, pp.119-26.
5. Scott, p.125.
6. Scott, p.187 ff.
7. Scott, p.207 ff.
8. Scott, p.328.
9. Scott, p.324.
10. Maeckelbergh, p.4.
11. Maeckelbergh, p.66.
12. Maeckelbergh, p.94.
13. Maeckelbergh, p.69.
14. Maeckelbergh, p.70.

15. Graeber, p.vii.
16. David Graeber, *A Fragment of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004); *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007).
17. Graeber, *Direct Action*, p.210.
18. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1966 [1910]). Michels argued that all organizations that claim to be democratic inevitably fall under the control of ruling elite.

REVIEWS

Giorel Curran, *21st Century Dissent: Anarchism, Anti-Globalisation and Environmentalism*

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 251pp

Giorel Curran's *21st Century Dissent* offers both a broad introduction and, at times, a more profound exploration of several over-lapping trends in contemporary radical politics, and in particular what Curran refers to as post-ideological anarchism. Ultimately, the book could be summarised as an account of 'contemporary activist anarchism' or 'the alterglobalisation movement', and readers familiar with (writings about) the movement will find some sections tread a predictable enough path; but the book also offers numerous layers of context which have been lacking from many otherwise similar accounts. In fact, parts of the book are best understood as a recent history of radical green philosophy/activism. A detailed account of 'Reclaim the Streets', for example, might have appeared a little dated or forced (even when the book was published in 2006) were we to expect an entirely up-to-date account of contemporary anarchist activism; but in taking this approach, Curran adds meaning to what activists are doing right now – a meaning that, at times, many activists themselves appear unaware of.

An interesting example of this is the lengthy discussion of Murray Bookchin, much of whose final decade of work amounted to an all-out onslaught against the new wave of anarchism which Curran discusses. Why, then, is he included? The answer for me is that, despite the constant claims that contemporary activists are wholly uninterested in 'old dead anarchists, or in anarchism as a body of theory' (p.9), they cannot but help be informed by the ideas of previous generations. You may be as likely to come across one of Bookchin's books in the rucksack of a modern activist as you are to find a Big Mac wrapper, but that does not mean modern anarchists are not influenced by him, or indeed by a great many other theorists of whom they know little, or nothing. Whereas many other writers attempt to primarily *give voice* to the various discourses of the movement, Curran

digs a little deeper, and whilst the result is at times a somewhat disjointed overview of radical discourses, it nicely complements those contemporary accounts that, however interesting in other ways, tend to overlook the wider philosophical and historical context.

The one criticism I would level at the book is that, like almost all accounts of the movement, it suffers from a considerable lack of critical engagement: is this new anarchism really beyond ideology, or is it in fact simply immersed in its own, often dogmatically rehearsed, beliefs? Even the constant refrain that this new anarchism is 'post-ideological' has itself become something of a mantra, and many important concepts, such as consensus decision-making and support for diversity, are often unquestioningly supported by movement actors. Like most other commentators, Curran appears happy to accept the post-ideology claim at face value.

All in all, however, this is a useful and interesting book, approaching some by now very familiar issues from numerous, and at times refreshing, angles.

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Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (eds), *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*

Semiotext(e) intervention series, 1, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007

ISBN-10: 1-58435-053-9, ISBN-13: 978-1-58435-053-8

This book is a reprint of an issue of the journal *Semiotext(e)* from 1980. At the time, the journal published regular collections of which this is a typical example: fragmentary, diffuse, interspersing contemporary activist materials with cutting-edge Continental philosophy, and oriented firmly to autonomous social movements in Europe and beyond. Perhaps this fusion is only possible from afar, with European autonomous activism and critical theory fusing into a distant ray of hope, much as movements from the South are received in Europe. Now reissued as a book, the text retains much of its diffusion and deliberate disorganisation, with articles of diverse types (analytical articles, political pieces, protest letters, court

and interrogation transcripts, diaries) interspersed with images. The book is written, it seems, to be dipped into, to stop at this article which looks interesting, that name which sounds familiar, not to be read as a continuous narrative. It clearly conveys the status of its subject-matter as a *movement*, creative and chaotic, not simply a scholarly perspective.

Long one of very few sources on one of Europe's most exciting social movements, and the main primary reference for non-Italian-speaking scholars of *autonomia*, the text has long been out of print and much sought after, particularly with the sudden boom in interest in *autonomia* following the recent reinvention of Negri and Virno and the rise of the new anti-capitalism. While it makes no attempt to speak to this later audience, who will doubtless be its main readers, this is perhaps for the best; it gives a more immediate insight into what *autonomia* was, before these later additions.

At the time of original publication, the peak of *autonomia* was long past and the movement was undergoing vicious repression at the hands of an increasingly authoritarian Italian state. The tone is correspondingly dark, and the focus if there is one is on repression, show trials, incarceration and the discourses surrounding the Red Brigades, which had been used as a pretext to persecute the whole of *autonomia*. The opening and closing pages are typical and highly moving, chronicling the monotony of life in jail through a counting of the days. This darkness is sad, and sobering in relation to how *autonomia* tends to be presented today. The book is divided almost down the middle, between the autonomous movements and their analysis of their repression. It is very much a view from 1980, a dark time for *autonomia*. Yet this situatedness does not undermine its importance. Indeed, it is resonant and relevant: the Italian repression foreshadows the 'war on terror' with disturbing familiarity.

It is impossible to summarise here the almost fifty pieces collected in the volume, but the nature of the pieces can be conveyed more concisely. All the major theorists of *autonomia* are here – Negri, 'Bifo', Virno, Tronti, Bologna, Piperno, Scalzone and more besides. Alongside them are well-known names of French philosophy: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Paul Virilio, Guy Debord, Sylvère Lotringer, writing in analysis or in support of the Italian events; and some outside reflections on particular movements. Also included are movement documents, with anonymous or collective authorship. The introduction, by Lotringer and

Marazzi, provides some historical context. It is hard to know what to pinpoint among its many interesting articles. Cherki and Wieviorka's classic article on autoredution remains the main source on the topic. Excerpts from Negri's 'Domination and Sabotage' give an insight into the thrilling Manicheanism of his earlier work. Tronti's 'Strategy of Refusal' and Bologna's 'Tribe of Moles' still stand out as analyses of the current period and strategies for autonomous action. Then there is the snippet by Guattari on integrated world capitalism, the excerpt from Virilio's *Popular Defence and Ecological Struggles* (later released in its entirety by the same publisher) ... But the book also stands out for the poetic – such as the piece 'Radio Alice – Free Radio', a collection of suggestive statements and short paragraphs, some theoretical, some emotive.

Overall, this is an intriguingly diverse collection presented in a refreshingly avant-garde way, including some pieces absolutely crucial to its field. Not the best text for those new to *autonomia*, it is perfect for deepening awareness of and getting a feel for the movement in its complexity and diversity. My only complaint is that it should have been made clearer that it is a reissue of the elusive journal issue, both to attract readers seeking the latter and to avoid people unwittingly buying it twice.

Andrew Robinson

(<http://andyrobinsontheoryblog.blogspot.com/>)

Bob Torres, *Making A Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*

Edinburgh & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008

Bob Torres is a vegan activist, assistant professor of sociology, social anarchist, video-game player and webmaster (along with his partner Jenna Torres) of the irreverent but wonderful *Vegan Freaks* website and podcast (<http://veganfreak.com/>). In *Making A Killing* he examines the relationships between animal agriculture and the commodification of everyday life. As you would expect, he is very critical of the ways in which meat production is embedded in social reality and the ways in which we are often prevented from seeing and acknowledging the suffering that this entails. This suffering is not just that of the

animals being made into food, but extends to the humans carrying out these tasks too – there are a number of very moving interview excerpts with slaughterhouse workers, who cope with their jobs using alcohol and violence to numb out the dysfunctional psychological impact of daily death.

Torres makes a convincing argument for seeing animals as part of the working class and then develops this further by drawing upon Murray Bookchin's social-ecological anarchism and Marxist political economy to analyse the hierarchical relationships that exist between humans and non-human animals.

In a move that is perhaps unsurprising to anarchists, Torres situates this in the structural inequalities that power and drive capitalism. As a trained agriculturalist himself, he is able to decode and deconstruct some of the technical processes that underpin meat production, and argues that these processes (like those of capitalism itself) have to be dismantled. In its place, a radically decentralised food production process in harmony with the environment and with other species needs to be developed in communities.

This takes the author on an interesting journey where he quite literally 'follows the money' and untangles the commodity chain that leads to a product arriving on our supermarket shelves. In turn, he also takes on some of the Animal Rights heavy hitters: Peter Singer is attacked for lacking a structural perspective, and PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, perhaps the populist signifier of animal rights radical chic) are lambasted for their rather peculiar stance of giving awards to humane slaughterhouse designers ...

It's at this point that, for me, the book loses its way, descending from its clear-sighted, unsentimental, fact-based analysis into hectoring polemic. Perhaps reflecting the influence of Bookchin, Torres starts laying down the anarchist law so to speak, stating that only an anarchism that draws upon structural and class-based analysis will right the situation. There also seems to be a form of ageism inherent in Torres' attacks on 'pop-punk shopping mall anarchism' (p.118), which echoes Bookchin's criticisms of 'lifestyle' anarchism, but is clearly directed at those teenagers and young people who have adopted a nomadic, huckster way of life. This seems to be a misunderstanding of this particular anarchist subculture in my opinion, which is about passive resistance rather than passive consumption. One consequence of Torres' view is that there seems to be little room for diversity of tactics.

However, this is not to detract from what is an excellent study of the intersections between animal rights, anarchism and socio-cultural politics. Torres has produced a book which is very readable and also does a much-needed job of linking animal rights thinking with anarchism and wider theoretical currents.

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Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*

Edinburgh & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009

Black Flame is an intriguing and infuriating work which deserves to be read and debated. Rich in both theory and history, the authors say their conclusions are 'quite striking' and result in a 'rethinking' of the anarchist canon (p.17). Furthermore, they very fairly say that 'if this book succeeds in promoting new research into anarchism, even if that research contradicts our arguments, we consider our work well done' (pp.26-7). However, the particularities of the argument, and the tone in which they are presented, distract from the possibilities of serious discussion regarding many of the book's stances.

Of particular interest is the last chapter, which is the best assemblage of research I have encountered on classical anarchism's complex relationship to questions of nationalism, imperialism and race. *Black Flame*'s stress on the rich anarchist and syndicalist traditions in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean serves as a 'crucial corrective to Eurocentric accounts' (p.21). Also of much interest is the careful explanation of the differences between different syndicalist unions.

Black Flame is also important in that it situates anarchism in its social and historical context. The authors argue that the notion of anarchism as a timeless part of human existence originates in Paul Eltzbacher's 1900 book *Anarchism*. It is only afterwards that anarchists themselves (especially Kropotkin) incorporate this idea into their own beliefs. *Black Flame* notes that 'if anarchism is a universal

feature of society, then it becomes difficult indeed to explain *why* it arises, or to place it in historical context, to delineate its boundaries, and analyze its class character and role at a particular time.' Therefore the traditional perspective 'fails to historicize the broad anarchist tradition, or explain why it arose as well as why it appealed to particular classes' (p.18).

The authors stress the necessity of a bounded definition of anarchism for scholarship: 'A good definition is one that highlights the distinguishing features of a given category, does so in a coherent fashion, and is able to differentiate that category from others, thereby organizing knowledge as well as enabling effective analysis and research' (p.43).

Unfortunately, their definition is achieved through a series of retroactive baptisms and excommunications. What they call the 'broad anarchist tradition' is actually exceedingly narrow in relation to self-identified anarchists. They start with 'class struggle anarchism' (which includes anarcho-communists, Platformists, the Friends of Durruti and Galleanist insurrectionists), and to this they add syndicalism – as such. Almost the entire membership of every global syndicalist union receives a mass anarchist baptism, along with Daniel DeLeon and James Connolly. In one rhetorical move, the 'broad anarchist tradition' gains millions of adherents.

But excommunicated are (what are quite possibly) the majority of today's self-identified anarchists. This includes the entirety of the philosophical, individualist, spiritual and 'lifestyle' traditions. The authors say 'we do not regard these currents as part of the broad anarchist tradition ... "Class struggle" anarchism, sometimes called revolutionary or communist anarchism, is not a type of anarchism; in our view, it is the *only* anarchism' (p.19). They disagree with Murray Bookchin for even *using* the derogatory term 'lifestyle anarchism', since 'it is incorrect to label these sects anarchist at all; they have no place in the anarchist tradition, for they are not anarchist' (p.170). (Yet, according to their cosmology, Bookchin is *also* not an anarchist!)

Their highly unusual definition is based on the claim that anarchism can be defined solely by the moment when Bakunin, during his stint in the International, authored some (arguably) narrowly workerist tracts. *Black Flame* claims syndicalism emerges directly from this period of Bakunin; correspondingly, they dub him an 'unreserved' syndicalist (p.134). They attempt to enrol many other anarchists as syndicalists, for example arguing that Errico Malatesta can be seen as 'an outright syndicalist' (p.202). Kropotkin, they claim, wrote *Mutual Aid* 'to prove the possi-

bility of a free socialist society, which was to be created by a class revolution' (p.302). Meanwhile, inconveniently proto-fascist syndicalists like Sorel and Labriola are excommunicated from this 'broad' tradition by similar rhetorical manoeuvres.

The authors are owed a great credit for their comprehensive assemblage of research on nationalism and imperialism, and for making the long overdue call to re-situate the classical tradition in its social and historical context. But their grand claims regarding what constitutes the misnamed 'broad anarchist tradition' strike me not only as unconvincing, but as unhistorical. Indeed, I actually found many of the positions *Black Flame* argues against – such as the notion that anarchism can be understood as a 'point of intersection of several ideologies' (p.40), and that anarchism and syndicalism are 'different, albeit overlapping, tendencies' (p.149) – to be far more convincing than the book's own claims.

Spencer Sunshine

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***Black Flame* and the broad anarchist tradition: a reply to Spencer Sunshine**

As Michael Schmidt and I noted in the opening chapter of *Black Flame: the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*, our book achieves its main aim when it provokes debate about the ideas, history and relevance of the broad anarchist tradition. As we wrote, 'good scholarship proceeds through debate, rather than the creation of new orthodoxies'. We welcome challenges and corrections based on research. It is in this spirit that we read Spencer Sunshine's review.

Yet debate is only fruitful when due care is taken to substantiate claims, and to argue points. And, regrettably, our reviewer has been rather careless in developing his criticisms, relying on the use of polemical language, assertions rather than refutations, and trivial anecdote.

Sunshine suggests that the 'particularities of the argument' in *Black Flame* detract from 'the possibilities of serious discussion regarding many of the book's stances'. The 'particularities of the argument' are, however, precisely what require 'serious discussion'. And 'serious discussion' is what his review lacks.

Rather than provide a substantive and substantiated criticism of *Black Flame*'s core theses, the reviewer relies instead on loaded language to delegitimise those theses.

Thus, Michael and I (he claims) operate essentially through a series of 'retroactive baptisms and excommunications' and the construction of a 'cosmology' *via* 'rhetorical manoeuvres'. Sunshine thus deploys religious metaphors in an attempt to negate the weight of evidence and logical argument that the book (the first in a set of two) develops over nearly 400 pages via an unmatched and genuinely global survey of 150 years of anarchist history on five continents. The vast synthesis involved, the textual evidence, the broad sweep of history, the innumerable cases cited – these are trivialised by a labelling strategy strong on style and imagery, but rather short on content.

No evidence is adduced to dispute our core theses: that the global anarchist movement emerged in the First International, that syndicalism is an integral part of the broad anarchist tradition, that this tradition centres on rationalism, socialism and anti-authoritarianism, that the writings of Mikhail Bakunin and Pyotr Kropotkin are representative of its core ideas, and that this 'narrow' definition is both empirically defensible and analytically useful.

Sunshine, having presented the authors as pronouncing *ex cathedra*, tends, in short, to base his major critique on assertions of faith, rather than demonstrations of fact.

He then claims, in all seriousness, that *Black Flame* has a 'highly unusual' understanding of the anarchist tradition. *Black Flame* has sinned in having 'excommunicated' what is ('quite possibly') the 'majority' of 'today's self-identified anarchists', the so-called 'philosophical, individualist, spiritual and "lifestyle" traditions'.

This time some evidence is provided – but it is mere anecdote. Personal impressions of a small segment of (an implicitly all-American) scene are offered as a refutation of a scholarly survey of 150 years of global history. Sunshine is himself understandably a bit unsure about the validity of generalising from such data: thus, the caveat 'quite possibly'.

We now find ourselves in an analytical *cul-de-sac* where the views of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, Liu Sifu, Ricardo Flores Magón, Nicolás Gutarra, T.W. Thibedi, Nestor Makhno, Juana Belém Gutiérrez de Mendoza, Kôtuku Shûsui, Shin Ch'aeho, Ba Jin, James Connolly, Chu Cha-Pei and many, many others, and the politics of organisations like the

Spanish CNT/CGT, the Australian IWW, the Bolivian FOL, the Mexican CGT, the Uruguayan FAU/OPR-33, the South African ISL/IWA, the Hunan Workers' Association, the Eastern Anarchist League, the Black Flag Alliance, *Ghadr*, the Bulgarian FAKB, Egypt's International Union of Workers and Employees, the Russian SKT and many, many others are treated as exemplifying 'highly unusual' aspects of the anarchist tradition. A mere byway in a tradition supposedly embodied by certain 'philosophical, individualist, spiritual and "lifestyle" traditions' – in America, today. Having argued along these lines, Sunshine concludes with the odd claim that it is, in fact, *Black Flame*'s analysis that 'strikes' the reader as 'unconvincing' and 'unhistorical'.

Again, however, the problem is an analysis centred on style (in this case, reducing anarchism to 'self-identity'), rather than on substance (movement politics and praxis).

Sunshine's review is correct in noting that *Black Flame* argues for a bounded, historical, precise definition of anarchism, and that the work aims at developing a 'crucial corrective to Eurocentric accounts'. His curt dismissal of the book, however, rests upon precisely the rather shaky analyses of anarchism and syndicalism that the book contests.

There is little room for generative debate in this sort of intervention, and it would be a pity if readers of *Anarchist Studies* were to dismiss *Black Flame* as a result of this review.

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Richard Porton (ed.), *Anarchist Film and Video, Arena No. 1*, PM Press & Christie Books, 2009

ISBN: 9781873976357, £7.50

A promising-looking new publication for those interested in anarchism and culture, *Arena* presents itself as a journal that 'will bring together stimulating writing and scholarship on all aspects of libertarian culture, arts, life and politics'.

The first number focuses on cinema and is edited by Richard Porton, author of the well known book *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* (Verso, 1999). Porton's introduction begins by asking what we mean when we speak of an anarchist cinema. Are we referring to films about the historical experience of anarchism and anarchists, or would we broaden our definition to take in anti-authoritarian works made by non-anarchists? Porton's own answer is to suggest that, despite a variety of styles and political origins, most 'anarchist' films promote self-emancipation and are inspired by the tradition of decentralised anarchist pedagogy.

The very diverse set of articles that follow might be seen as building on the thrust of this argument. Some engage with the largely neglected and inevitably discontinuous history of anarchist involvement in film, and use of film as political pedagogy: the short-lived *Cinéma du Peuple* co-operative that emerged in France in 1913-14; anarchist cinema during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939; the career of Armand Guerra, an important film-maker who linked these two periods; anarchist Gustave Cauvin's pioneering development of educational film. Other articles discuss the success or failure of films that set out to represent moments and figures in anarchist history: Theo Angelopoulos's *Alexander the Great* (1980), William Keddell's *The Maintenance of Silence* (1985), a film about New Zealander Ian Robert's 1982 suicide-bombing of the national police computer data-base. A cluster of articles shift the focus to the present, looking at anarchist film festivals, the use of video recording to record police repression, and, more broadly, the diverse range of anarchist video in the new century.

Collectively, the pieces give a sense of the breadth and variety of anarchist cinema, and do important work by bringing neglected historical moments and marginalised practices into visibility. They also underscore how a rounded analysis of anarchist cinema needs to embrace both analysis of film form (notably the adequacy of formal choices to content) and political economy (the conditions of film production, distribution and exhibition). They are, however, uneven. Emeterio Diez's long piece on anarchist cinema in the Spanish Civil War is formidably well researched and packed with information, but needed more structure and a more developed analysis. Isabelle Marinoine's piece on Cauvin could have explored his political evolution with a little more critical distance. Pieces by Russell Campbell and Dan Georgiakis on Keddell and Angelopoulos respectively carry out productive formal analysis; while Andrew Lee's account of Vicente Aranda's star-

studded *Libertarias* rightly underscores the film's superficial treatment of its subject, the anarchist feminists who fought in the Civil War. Andrew Hedden's article on contemporary anarchist video is of considerable current relevance. By developing an analysis of an e-mail survey carried out with over fifty self-identified individuals and groups involved in anarchist video production around the world, the article provides a fascinating account of how people reflect on their own film-making practice and the problems they face. One telling section underscores the tendency of the image to be drawn to the spectacular dimension of demonstrations with a resultant neglect of less photogenic political activities. Overall, despite its unevenness, the journal issue provides productive ways to think about anarchist film-making. It will be interesting to see how the journal develops and how it deals with other areas of cultural production.

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The Angry Brigade: The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Britain's First Urban Guerrilla Group

Produced and directed by Gordon Carr (1973, 60 minutes)

Extras: *The Persons Unknown* (1980, 22 minutes)

PM Press, 2008, £12.95

One of Britain's few home-grown terrorist groups, the Angry Brigade, found innovative ways of embarrassing the Heath government for the year following August 1970. The Brigade were the impetus behind the establishment of the Bomb squad, and the centre of a conspiracy trial that was of record length; and the case fuelled a public belief in police corruption, and the role of personal vendetta in prosecution and investigation. Always diverse in its engagement, the Brigade's claimed successes included attacks on the boutique Biba and the BBC outside-broadcast van at London's Miss World competition. This DVD of a documentary from 1973 was therefore broadcast on a channel that had earlier been targeted by the Brigade.

The release of the documentary on DVD is timely. In a post-9/11 world, Europe and America are re-evaluating their own past flirtations with terror. *The*

Angry Brigade documentary, made in 1973, makes explicit the links between past state violence and contemporary acts of terrorism. It also fits well with the current growing interest in the 1970s. Historians are currently turning towards the 1970s as a period in its own right rather than as an addendum to 'the sixties', so discussions of the Angry Brigade can act as a counterweight to previous nostalgic celebrations of popular culture, wide surveys of the 'long sixties'¹ or the recent revisionist return to top-down histories of Dominic Sandbrook.²

If we want to know about the impact of the Angry Brigade and the conspiracy trials, the aftermath is a useful place to start. For those involved, and those accused, the real politicisation occurred through the experiences of being identified, investigated, prosecuted and incarcerated. The conspiracy charges became self-fulfilling, as the networks around the court cases built up lines of support and defence and hardened political positions. When Angie Weir and Kate Maclean were interviewed in *Time Out* shortly after being found not guilty, they made it clear that their experiences of the trial had encouraged them to move towards a Marxist analysis.³ John Barker was sentenced to ten years in prison, and his account of his time inside shows how his experiences in prison solidified what had previously been an abstracted class-based analysis.⁴

Furthermore, through the inclusion on the DVD of *Persons Unknown*, a short documentary about the prosecution of sections of the anarcho-punk scene in 1980s Britain, the Angry Brigade are no longer placed at the end zone of a long sixties, proof that the dove of peace and peacock of counter-cultural performance are inevitably turned towards the black hawk. Instead, the Angry Brigade, and with it the 1970s, are presented as historically significant in and of themselves, with legacies and hangovers of their own. The legal threat represented by conspiracy charges continued, as did the Angry Brigade's style of Situationist and anarchist-influenced resistance. *Persons Unknown* shows us how both the charges, and the resistance, were translated through punk rock, by bringing together rare footage of Crass, cut against interviews with the Angry Brigade's Stuart Christie on his island retreat.

As a documentary *Angry Brigade* is very much a product of its time, more *Blue Peter* than Boy Scouts guide to Situationism. What this DVD does, however, is show us documentary norms and aesthetics within their historical context – it provides a study in producing a politically engaged documentary from within,

raising a key issue from the trial. The accused, largely connected through their involvement in the underground or counter-cultural press, were confronted with press silence, or bias, during the trial. And the controversy around the trial also focused on a central issue shared by documentary theorists – what constitutes a document (or evidence)?

In parts *The Angry Brigade* was a re-educational project, providing accessible explanations of communal living and collectivised childcare, or the difference between communism and grassroots direct action. The section that uses the trial to summarise Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* turns the critique back on the documentary producers themselves. However, much of this is not new to today's viewer, largely because the style and content have been picked up in other forms since. The same images are used in the existing books on the Brigade – for example *The Guardian* cartoon of the Stoke Newington 8 – as are the same photos of protagonists (some of the photos of the defendants had reproduction royalties held by the accused – so reporting the trials unwittingly supported the defence team). There are already two sets of documents, chronology and commentary on the Brigade available in printed form: Jean Weir's 1978 pamphlet *Angry Brigade, 1967-84: Documents and Chronology* is still regularly reprinted, as is Tom Vague's contribution to English Psychogeography, *Anarchy in the UK: The Angry Brigade*. This isn't a criticism based on repetition; actually it seems wholly appropriate. These shared images, symbols and aesthetics, in their shared cut-and-paste style, exemplified British Situationism's 'look at the cracks' approach to narrative.

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NOTES

1. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford University Press, 1998).
2. Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus, 2006).
3. A. Weir and K. McLean, 'Interview' in *Time Out* no.148 (15-21 October 1972), pp.6-8.
4. John Barker, *Bending the Bars: Prison Stories of an Angry Brigade Member* (Hastings: Christie Books, 2007)

Colin Ward (1924-2010)

Colin Ward, who has died aged 85, was the most read as well as the most original British anarchist writer of the second half of the twentieth century.

Brought up in suburban East London, he was a 'failure' at school, leaving at fifteen to take jobs in building, municipal housing and then a series of architects' offices, thereby generating the expertise for the bulk of his output as a writer. In the mid-sixties he retrained as a teacher but for most of the seventies was education officer for the Town and Country Planning Association, resigning in 1979 to become a full-time author.

It was conscription into the British Army during the Second World War that radicalized him, since, posted to Glasgow, he admired its anarchist orators, attended their weekly meetings and began to write for Freedom Press's periodicals. On demobilization in 1947 and back in London he was invited to join *Freedom's* editorial collective, thus beginning intimate association with the people who were to become, in his description, his 'closest and dearest friends.'

His spare-time journalistic apprenticeship was daunting, writing articles for *Freedom*, a weekly throughout the fifties. He was enabled to break from this treadmill when his fellow editors gave him his head from 1961 to 1970 with the monthly *Anarchy* (while they continued to bring out *Freedom* for the other three weeks of the month). *Anarchy* exuded vitality, was in touch with the trends of the decade, and appealed to the young – and it continues to excite. Its preoccupations centred on housing and squatting, progressive education, workers' control, and crime and punishment. It showcased Ward's distinctive anarchism, already apparent in his articles for *Freedom*, but now standing alone or supported by like-minded contributors.

It was the editorship of *Anarchy* that released him from the obscurity of *Freedom* and Freedom Press and made his name. During the sixties he began to be asked to write for other journals, not only in the realm of dissident politics but also

for such titles as the recently established *New Society*. From 1978 he became a regular contributor to *New Society*'s full-page 'Stand' column; and when ten years later *New Society* was merged with the *New Statesman* he was retained as a columnist for the resultant *New Statesman and Society*, with the shorter, but weekly, 'Fringe Benefits'. He also wrote a long-running column for *Town and Country Planning* and an 'Anarchist Notebook' for *Freedom*, and in addition contributed columns to the *Architects' Journal*. Through his columns many unsuspecting readers were exposed to anarchist ideas, for, whatever he might be doing, he always saw himself first and foremost as an anarchist propagandist.

His first books came as late as 1970-72, but these were intended for teenagers and published by Penguin Education. His third book, *Anarchy in Action* (1973), was his only work on the theory of anarchism, and indeed the only one 'directly and specifically about anarchism' until his final publication, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (2004). In *Anarchy in Action* he makes entirely explicit his highly original anarchism (even if, as he always acknowledged, much indebted to Kropotkin and Landauer). The opening words have been much quoted: 'The argument of this book is that an anarchist society, a society which organizes itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism'. His kind of anarchism, 'far from being a speculative vision of a future society ... is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society'.

It is Ward's vision of anarchism, along with his many years of working in architecture and planning, that account for his concentration on 'anarchist applications' or 'anarchist solutions' to 'immediate issues in which people *are actually likely to get involved* ...'. Although he claimed in 1997 that 'all my books hang together as an exploration of the relations between people and their environment' (by which he means the built, rather than the 'natural' environment), and while this clearly covers nine-tenths of his oeuvre, it seems, rather (as he had put it earlier), that all his publications are 'looking at life from an anarchist point of view'. So the 'anarchist applications' concern housing: *Tenants Take Over* (1974), *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (1976), *When We Build Again Let's Have Housing That Works!*

(1985) and *Talking Houses* (1990); architecture and planning: *Welcome, Thinner City: Urban Survival in the 1990s* (1989), *New Town, Home Town: The Lessons of Experience* (1993), *Talking to Architects* (1996) and (with Peter Hall) *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (1998); education: *Talking Schools* (1995); education and the environment: (with Anthony Fyson) *Streetwork: The Exploding School* (1973), *The Child in the City* (1978) and *The Child in the Country* (1988); education, work and housing: *Havens and Springboards: The Foyer Movement in Context* (1997); transport: (with Ruth Rendell) *Undermining the Central Line* (1989) and *Freedom to Go: After the Motor Age* (1991); and water: *Reflected in Water: A Crisis of Social Responsibility* (1997). A surprisingly large number of his books were written in collaboration, something he particularly enjoyed, for he was an exceptionally friendly as well as generous man.

Ward was scornful of most other anarchists' obsession with the history of their tradition: 'I think the besetting sin of anarchism has been its preoccupation with its own past ...' Still, despite his own emphasis on the here-and-now and the future, he wrote four important historical works, the first two with Dennis Hardy and the third with David Crouch: *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (1984); *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (1986); *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (1988); and *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (2002). The masterly *Arcadia for All*, a history of the 'plotlands' of south-east England, is simply a natural extension back into the recent past of his major interest in self-build and squatting in the present, while *Cotters and Squatters* draws from their entire historical record in England and Wales. In *Goodnight Campers!*, the entrepreneurial holiday camps are traced to their origins in the early twentieth century and the 'pioneer camps', in which a key role was played by major organizations of working-class self-help and mutual aid: the co-operative movement and trade unions. The historic importance of such institutions in the provision of welfare and the maintenance of social solidarity was to become a theme of increasing significance in Ward's work; and he is currently being identified as a 'pioneer of mutualism'.

His wife, Harriet, was the daughter of Dora Russell, the feminist advocate of birth control and libertarian schooling.

David Goodway